

2011

Parnassus 2011

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ART AND LITERATURE OF TAYLOR UNIVERSITY

PARNASSUS

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PARNASSUS 2011

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

All good art demands two things: a sacrifice from its creator and surrender from its receiver. To those artists at Taylor who took the risk and chose to share their gifts with us, I offer my sincerest gratitude. It has truly been a privilege to receive and publish your work.

To the readers: I hope that most of you have had the experience of hearing a story (or reading a poem, or viewing a painting) and having your mind penetrated by a new perspective. As you flip through this journal and consider the different styles and subjects represented, I would like to offer a few words of wisdom from C.S. Lewis' *An Experiment in Criticism*: "We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way."

In doing this, we allow art to do what it was always meant to do—give us a greater understanding and appreciation of each other as created creators.

I would like to thank this year's staff for the dedication, conviction and vision they have shown throughout this journey. I am also grateful to all of the Taylor faculty who contributed their support and opinions, including Professor Satterlee and our panel of judges. Thanks also to poet Jeanne Murray Walker for providing the interview included in the appendices.

May you find a new perspective here. Look. Listen. Receive.

Ellen McConnell

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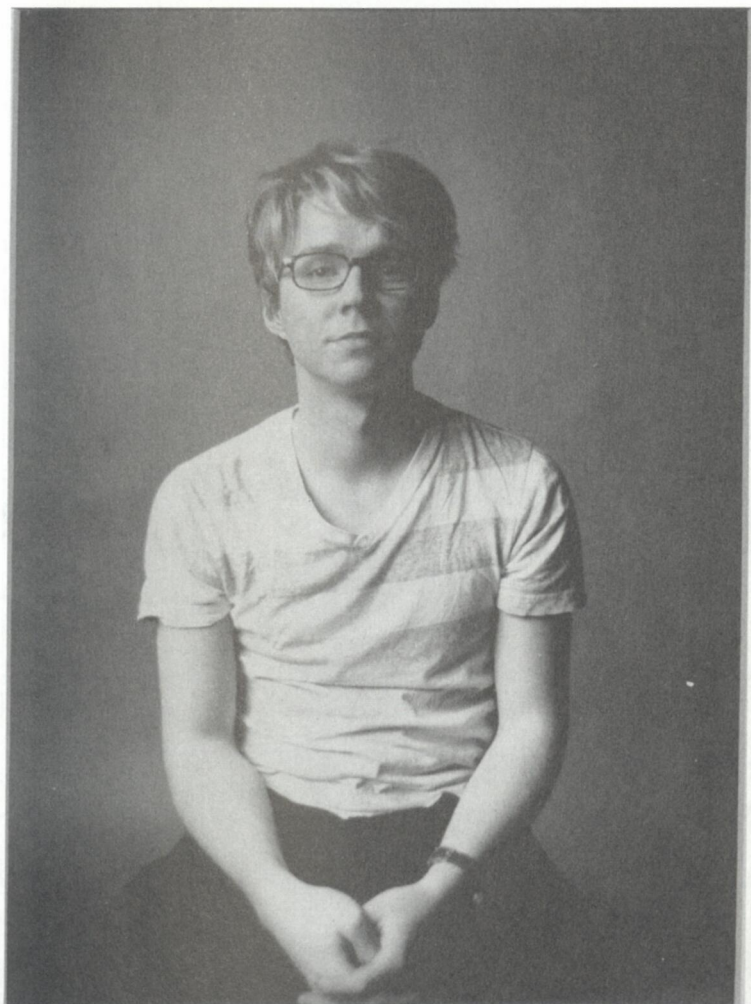
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The Words I Never Say

Valerie Prescott



the words I never say
end up in everything I write
can you hear them?
they hide, like frightened children,
tucked away in shadowed corners
and hallway closets that smell of
mothballs and winter
only rarely do they prance about
honest and forthright and brave
faces flushed with vigor
exultant in their authenticity
no, no, normally they cower
behind whatever else is on the page
and peek around with liquid eyes
they're always there
a heartbeat, steady beneath
a thin latticework of veins,
speaking what I cannot
can you hear me?



T LUKE SHUMAN

Jessie Riley



MERE SHADOWS

Nate Wheeler

Fall Like Shooting Stars

"I wish on you..."

And hearing this, he sped across the sky much faster and brighter than he had anticipated. Oh, what wings it gave you to be wished on.

But having no brain (for where would he put it?) he missed the exit for "Orbit" and instead he began to hurtle himself downward. He didn't quite know why, but it was exhilarating, and right now that was all that mattered.

Hannah Chupp

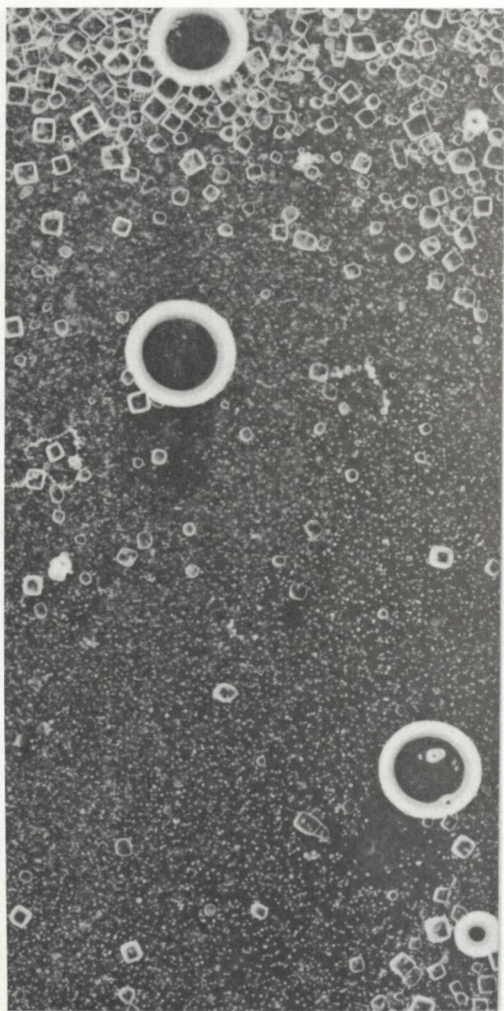
The dark and empty brilliance of space was wiped foggily away by the clouds and he soon saw familiar shapes. Ones he had seen so many times but so much farther away. As he fell toward them, the shapes gave way to patches of color, he soon discerned, of farm plots, of acres of trees, of miles of city.

They grew closer and closer, and as soon as he deciphered that this great green poof was a tree, he was already within its depths. Leaves tickled him, teased him, invited his claustrophobia out to play, until he ignited them.

The tree sprang up in a brilliant orange, a color so inspiring that its neighbors did the same. Yellow, red, orange again, glowing. Only the proud firs stood staunchly ever green.

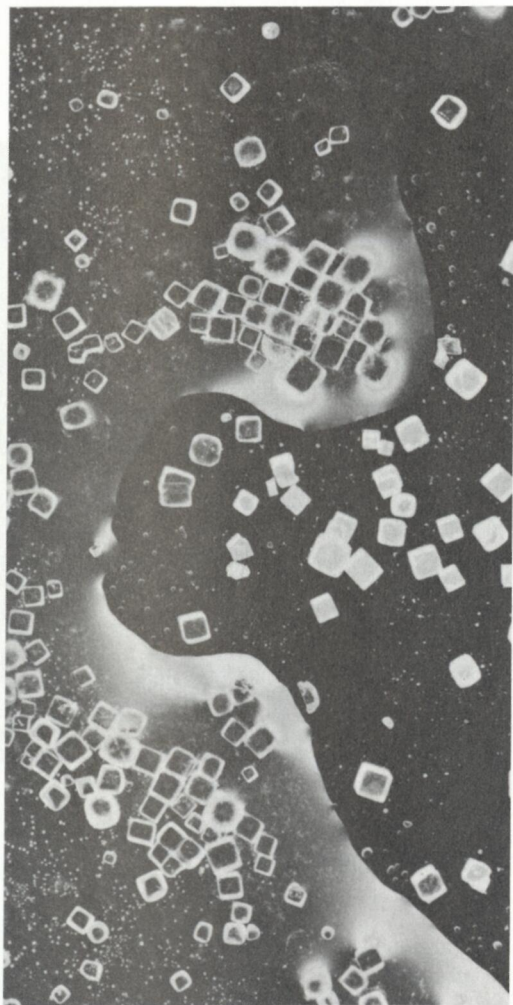
As the month wore on, the fiery leaves began to weary of him and of their old home, dropping off to create a veritable mirror on the green grass. And eventually, the green, green grass was covered in white, the mirror image molded, and the tree itself became a skeleton.

Such is the life of a meteor(ite).



I FEEL THE CRUSHING DEPTHS

Now Wheeler



I SEE THE CRASHING OCEAN

Melissa Jerome

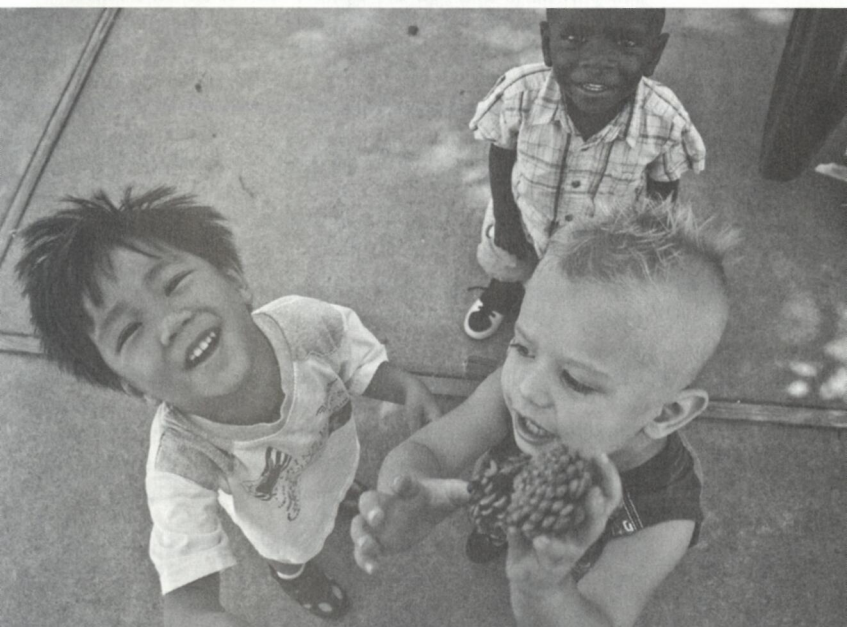


Second Place
Art

Orphan

Anna Soden

A shout pierces the sunlight
I turn
almost too late to catch
the small bundle
hurtling toward me.
Rapid Spanish and laughter greet
my untrained ears.
I catch him in my arms
squeeze tight
and smile.
Tiny arms around my neck
eagerly soaking in
the strange new concept:
Love.



THE VANQUISHING OF THE ENEMY PINECONES

Dustin Friesen

Grandfather Grandson

I never knew my grandpa well, though I'm told I'm like him. He died when I was sixteen.

My grandpa was a precise amalgamation of a wizened cowboy, a famous movie star, and a coalmine worker. I like to picture him mounted on the back of a painted horse, spurred boots glimmering in the setting sun, heading for a valley between two snow-tipped mountains. The family dogs yip and playfully romp alongside him.

Thaddeus Harmon

Second Place
Prose

I once had a dream that I was my grandpa. In the steamy-eyed world of sleep, I was as paper floating in air, until I materialized into saggy flesh and stood in the parking lot of a fair. I was cold and my knees were weak. Then I was kneeling as a great wind and a bright light began to sweep away Ferris wheels, and screaming children, and cars. I saw my grey speckled flesh rip from bone and muscle, dancing in the air before it was forever swept away.

I wonder if he felt like that in the end—trapped in a swirling void of ecstatic destruction.

My grandpa was a presence. He had a deep voice, or at least it was a voice that had the texture of deepness, and when he sputtered forth speech it was invariably, though quite unintentionally, cryptic. As dementia took its snake-like hold on his brain, his sentences became more and more shuffled, and his vocabulary increasingly creative.

Toward the end, my aunt kept a quote book.

"I don't know what the hell you guys are doing!" he

would often mumble. I now see the wisdom in those words.

My grandpa was a man of structure. Things were ordered in his world. Though old age had often resigned him to the frames of various chairs, he never seemed to lose control of the central, earthly part of his existence. When he could, he moved with all the intentionality of an iron stove, and when he communicated, it was almost always to commiserate or enlighten. Commiseration was for his peers; enlightenment was for the rest of us.

I never knew my grandpa well, though I'm told I'm like him. He died when I was sixteen.

My grandpa loved dogs. Dogs loved my grandpa. When we would come on Sunday visits, there were almost always dogs meandering about the room, being sure to occasionally walk by my grandpa's chair to receive a characteristically hard series of pats. He would pat them so hard that I would almost cringe. But they were drawn to him like waves to shore.

Perhaps more than any other, my dog, Kenya, loved grandpa. She would lounge longingly for hours by his cracked and leathered chair as the unwatched transmissions of a culture equally foreign and disturbing to them both leaked through the corners of the television set. It was as if they were two youthful souls, resigned to a weary existence to which the only answer was rest.

I remember the funeral. The church was imposing. Four enormous columns marked the entrance, and a large double door swung open into a disappointingly stuffy foyer, sparsely decorated in typical Protestant fashion. I recall breathing shallowly as we clicked our way across the tiled floor, admiring the wooden casket

chosen for him. It wasn't like other caskets I'd seen. It didn't shine. It was more natural looking, tender brown with visible age lines and sturdy handles. Though the fearsome thing wasn't open when I admired its awkward presence, I remember thinking that the casket was a perfect representation of my grandpa—stoic yet endearing, handsome yet functional.

Somewhere my grandma was gently sniffing. Someone was holding her.

On all of the faces solemnly moving about, there seemed to be an unspoken understanding that something great had left this earth. The horrific face of death mocked us all that day, weighing heavily like storm clouds in a summer sky.

During the service, we sat on the left side of the aisle as the pastor spoke genuinely and caringly about a man he hardly knew. He painted my grandpa well, though later as my father would carefully critique, too graciously. I'm not sure what his exact words were, but I'd like to think he compared my grandpa to a great oak tree, grown from a meager scion until his roots penetrated the sandy soil of his circumstance, deeper and deeper, his presence stretching higher and higher toward the sky, until with old age, his enormous canvas provided shelter for the seeds of his fruit to fertilize themselves in the tender soil around him. My grandpa always loved his family. I've always loved trees.

I never knew my grandpa well, though I'm told I'm like him. He died when I was sixteen.

My grandpa was mysterious. When I was lower to the ground, he would take me on walks to McDonald's. His strides were smooth and brimming with purpose. He didn't speak much, and I would return the favor. He always knew

when the lights would change, and would set our pace accordingly. Toward the end, we walked more slowly, and waited at red lights. I didn't mind.

I never wept over my grandpa's death. In fact, I've never wept over anyone's death. I used to think something was wrong with me, as I, in my asphyxiating teenage skin, would wander tearlessly around rooms filled with contorted faces, wet with passion. Later I would learn to cry. A woman would help me.

Sometimes my father says, "God cursed me to raise my own father." I never know why he says that.

Before the end, before the nursing home, there was an important birthday party for my grandpa. He was rolled around the yard in a wheelchair, clad in a green turtle neck with a green fleece vest. A brown woolen blanket rested on his lap, and atop his head was perched a woven hat. His face was gaunt to the point of concern.

I remember watching his stillness as dogs, children, and adults clambered all around him. I wondered if he felt alone. I prayed that he didn't. It was a selfish prayer.

My grandpa was loved. When he could no longer walk, defecate, or eat by himself, his family was there beside him—to the end. My grandmother would sit with him by his hospital bed for hours, silently, dutifully, and lovingly—fulfilling vows taken long ago, vows never forgotten.

Once, on a tender afternoon, my grandpa was sitting in the center of his sunroom. Clear shafts of blue light penetrated the room, and everything took on an ethereal quality. My grandpa sat tall, and after my mother had left the room, looked intently into my eyes. He said, "Hang in there, kid. Take care of yourself...for me...for me." Then his eyes became glossy again, and he asked

somebody whether or not the processes were running like they should. I left the room. My eyes were glossy too.

I never knew my grandpa well, though I'm told I'm like him. He died when I was sixteen. I wish he hadn't.



GOD'S SKETCHES

Ashley Davis

A Time Under Yours

Run alive

Into that moving field
Far away
With your eyes concealed

To never seek the world

A memory that sinks above
The wet tips of wheat
The death your past dreamt of

Crafting the silent waves

So lie still
Trapped under the wind
Draining fingered cups
With your rain drenched grin

Never to look up

And maybe someday
When the moon turns black

You could straighten your knees
And burden your back

To lift up your heart

Andrew Morgan

But that could be then
Then so far from now

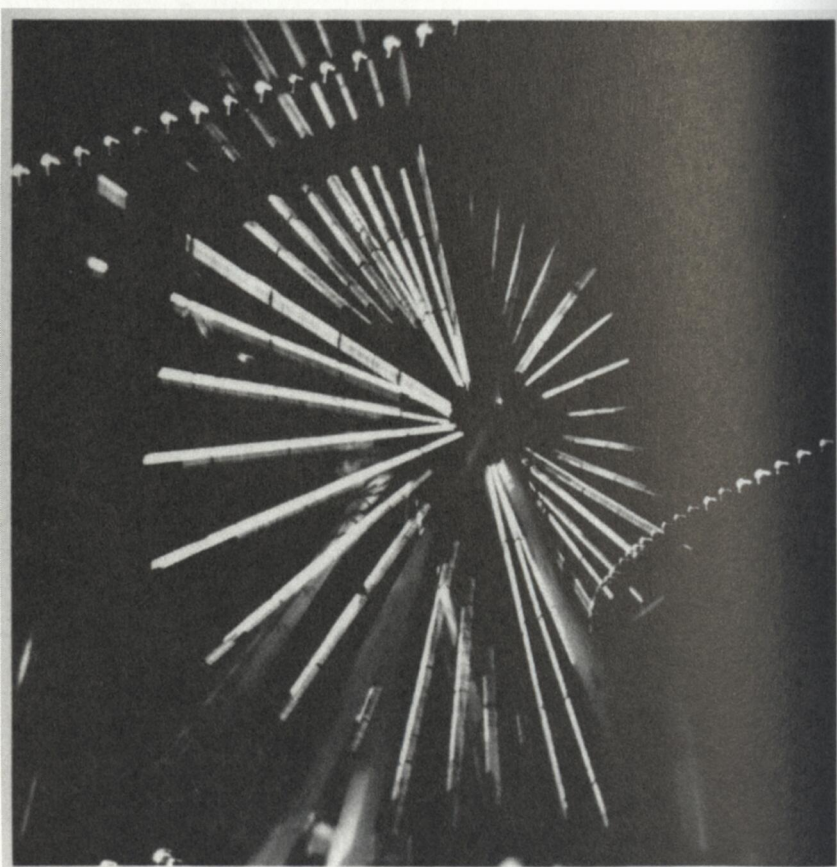
Our future never bends

Not in this moving field
No more than wind allows

A Fine Order Point

and the other side of the

world is the other side



FERRIS WHEEL

Brent Clouse

LIGHTNING

Lightning flashes.
she dances across a black ballroom
with fleet footsteps,
never stopping to rest,
to breathe.

ribbons of light trail behind,
cutting the sky to shreds
with sharp brilliant edges.
beautiful, dangerous,
she skirts the stormy clouds
taunting them to
dance along.

a BOOMING “no”
their only reply.

clouds with billowy pompous big heads.
think they own the sky.
always gloomy, grumpy.
like old men they sit
in overstuffed armchairs
waiting to scold
wanting submission.

but she will not be tamed.
summer nights beg for Lightning’s wild dance
for the pitter-patter drum beat
of Rain’s accompanying song.
graceful, stunning, fierce,

Rachel Nolan

she pirouettes across the sky;
her beauty the envy
of all her beholders.

STOP, the clouds roar.
she must refuse.
the earth beckons
her feet.

Just one more dance.



The Soul Look Out

Nate Wheeler



ATOMIC QUERY

(Modern Thoughts on Passover)

So many months pass by and pass on
into waste baskets stained with
the coffee grounds of all these Western
mornings, soon to be forgotten.

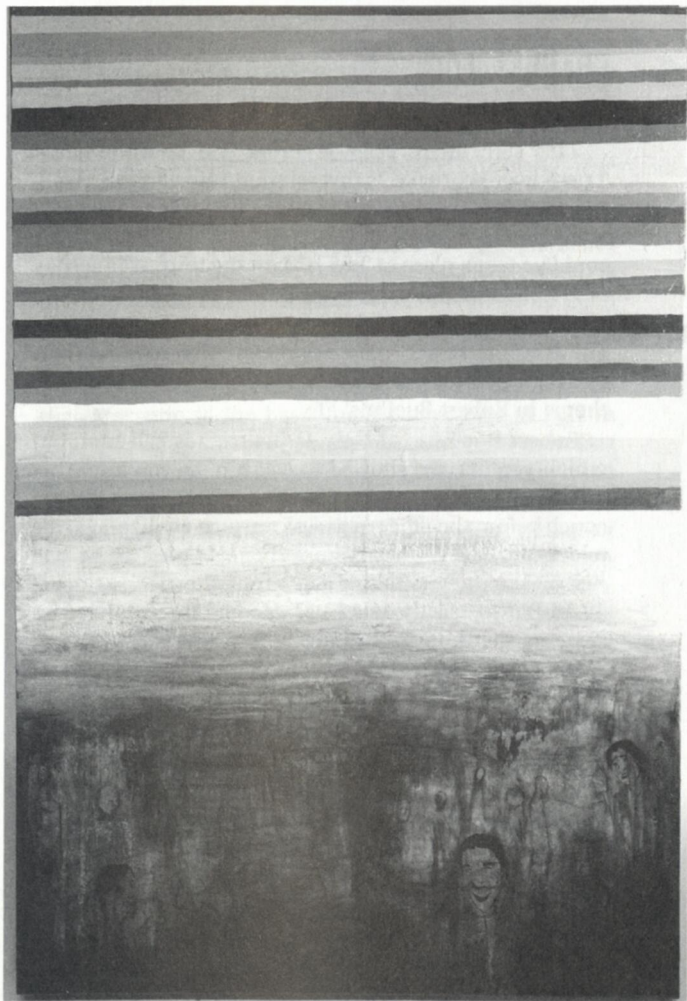
Thaddeus Harmon

Time laughs, mocking from its
crystalline cathedral in sporadic
tones begging us to explain with what
certainty we believe
there was ever anything before this—
the singular tick of the present tock.

But we respond, resourceful and self-aware,
with all our prods and incisors and
magnifying glasses pointed hopefully
into the dirt, past the ages and
through to the smallest, the simplest.

We gnaw and feel and look, accepting
our courageous conceptualizations each time
anew, wondering all the while whether
the same atoms were waiting there on our door posts,
passing quietly through the desert air and drifting off,

To be corralled again for one child's birth.



Hiroshima & Everything After

Jacob Fulton

CHANNEL FOUR

This story takes place at 12:34 AM on the second Tuesday of February. Is this relevant information? Well, the mere fact that it is stated as the first line of the story would seem to suggest that it is, but really this story could've taken place at 2:56 AM on the third Wednesday of December and the outcome would be the same.

Brian Steinke

Already this should suggest that perhaps the details are less important than what actually occurs. This preface is pretty much irrelevant, which is an ongoing theme in Robert Buellins' life.

Robert Buellins (or Rob, as his friends call him, but which you are not allowed to call him as you have just met the man) was lying slothfully on his red-striped couch before the modern god of western civilization, the television. His clothes were rather rumpled as he had just woken up from taking a nap from the precise time of 10:14 PM to exactly 11:47 PM. He had not intended on sleeping that long, but rather just to rest his eyes from staring at the demigod of the day, his laptop (it's a Dell if you are into that kind of detail).

Rob (I, however, am allowed to call him this as I have known him far longer than you have) works by day as a technical writer of instructional manuals for assembling backyard grills. Occasionally he works on writing the manuals for video game systems, but that is a rare occasion (thus the use of the word "occasionally") since video game systems are released only every five years or so.

Rob has grown up considerably over the last few years since the passing of his father, Robert Michael Buellins.

Rob does not have a "Jr." after his name or a "II" because he always felt that because his middle name is Mercutio, he did not have the exact same name as his father. Does that disqualify him from legitimately being called Robert Buellins the second? Rob doesn't know and neither do I so we'll just assume that it doesn't matter.

The selection of the middle name of Mercutio is a clear hint to the kind of family that Rob grew up in. For the less-literarily inclined, Mercutio is a character in Shakespeare's famous *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio is one of Romeo's close friends who is regrettably slain by Tybalt, whom Romeo slays as vengeance and leads to the unfortunate downfall of many of the characters. To help explain this better, perhaps it'd be easier to say that Mercutio is the basis for the character of Riff in *West Side Story* or that he's the black drag queen in Baz Luhrmann's reimagining *Romeo + Juliet* with the then still-cute Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Was any of this relevant to your understanding of the Buellins' family? I should hope not because it isn't. Robert Senior simply chose the name because he was bored when his wife, Carla, took him to a Shakespeare Festival and he inadvertently fell asleep during the performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. It has been surmised that Robert heard the name Mercutio in his sleep and it stuck with him for one reason or another. His wife was so pleased to hear him suggest the name for their son that she didn't question if he even had a clue who the character was, much less what happened to him. (Being the catalyst for a double suicide is hardly the kind of legacy I'd want to be named after, would you? I guess it's better than Robert Adolf Buellins at least.)

Rob has two other siblings, an older brother named Kyle and a younger sister named Izzie. However, since neither of them actually appear during the window of

10:14 PM of the second Monday of February and 1:15 AM on the second Tuesday of February (when this story takes place), there is no real reason to go into any further detail about them.

Don't assume that I say this just to namedrop and move on. Kyle and Izzie have led quite interesting lives. Kyle, for example, married his high school sweetheart, Rachel, just last fall. How they met is a very amusing tale filled with misunderstanding and "will they/won't they" tension. Izzie is still in high school so we don't know as much about her as her older siblings. Izzie has some of the curliest brown hair you'll ever see and though she says that she hates it, she secretly loves being different from her friends.

As you can see, hardly as interesting as Rob sprawled out on a red-striped couch, are they? I didn't think so.

As is often the case, there is very little television worth watching late in the evening. As Rob is neither a stoner nor an alcoholic, he finds very little to enjoy from Cartoon Network's Adult Swim line-up of terrible "shows." (The word choice here should indicate a bit of the author's own interjection.) Instead, he has inevitably wound up watching one of the channels taken over by infomercials.

This is where the crux of the story happens. You see, on channel four an infomercial for the latest in countertop cleaning products is showing. Rob sees this and is reminded just how dirty his countertops are. Knowing that he won't be getting back to sleep anytime soon, Rob gets up and cleans his countertops. However, unbeknownst to him, his roommate Kevin (don't worry, he hasn't been mentioned previously) has rearranged some of the items in the closet where Rob keeps the cleaning supplies. Though he has no problem getting out the countertop cleaner (it's a generic name brand that

even I don't care to recall), it is the act of putting it back that causes things to radically change.

Still not entirely awake and having entered a cleaning state like a Martha Stewart zombie (if this reference fails to hit home, you may insert "like a robotic maid" in its stead), Rob is unaware that Kevin has placed some of his sports trophies from high school (quite a packrat, you see) on the shelf right above the cleaning supplies. Rob opens the door, puts away the countertop cleaner, and accidentally bumps the door, knocking the trophies (which were hastily put away in the first place) off of the shelf and crashing onto his head.

Rob suffers a pretty severe head injury and isn't found until 12:57 AM when Kevin returns from the party he had gone to. Finding Rob unconscious on the floor, Kevin immediately calls 912 (he is slightly drunk after all) and 191 before finally getting the digits in the correct order. An ambulance arrives and carts Rob to the nearest hospital.

Though unconscious, Rob still has a semblance of awareness within his own head. Realizing how close he came to dying and how close he could still be to his own impending death, Rob takes stock of his life and realizes that he hates his job and wishes he could be an actor like he always wanted to be.

Rob awakens five minutes later at 1:15 AM (Rob and Kevin's apartment isn't that far from the hospital, thus the quick reaction time) with a desire to turn his life around and this starts him on a path to become a stage actor, who will change the way audiences view drama.

But Rob isn't watching channel four.

He's watching channel six, which has the latest juicer. Rob gets up, drinks a glass of orange juice, and returns to the couch where he falls back asleep, no better off than

ever before.

But wait, what was the point then of explaining channel four? I'm glad you asked that question because that is the entire point.

You only know things about Rob based on what I have told you, nothing else. You don't know his eye color (it's hazel) or his hair color (dirty blond) prior to this. You don't know his age (25) or his ethnicity (he's half Irish, half German). In short, you really know nothing about Robert Mercutio Buellins.

But that has had little impact on how you read this, hasn't it? Perhaps you wondered about the random interjections of details that had no importance to the central narrative. After all, knowing Rob's middle name, the fact that his father died, and that he has two siblings has had absolutely no impact on the plot of Rob watching TV and stumbling across an infomercial of grand importance.

So why expect anything grand from the infomercial either? Stories generally seem to exist in the world of almost absurd probability. Gifted writers hide this fact by setting up reality prior to this. Poor writers are called upon for using the classic "God from the machine" way to conclude things. Oh, this character's uncle who we've never heard of just died and left him the money to keep open the candy shop, hooray! Oh, she realizes that the man was the one who had rescued her teddy bear when they were both five and now knows that they're meant for each other.

All coincidences. Why do we accept them so readily in our fiction? I'm hardly suggesting that what you've just read is good fiction. Far from it, this was some terrible stuff. If you are off put by having the author directly address you, thus breaking the "fourth wall,"

well, perhaps you even hated this.

You might not agree with the point either, but I just wish to suggest this.

As a narrator, you are literally a god of the universe you create. Whatever details you write are important. If I had taken this seriously, I wouldn't have shared Rob's age or physical description because it really isn't relevant to the meaning of the story. Oftentimes it seems that we as writers must only present the relevant details and if there is a scene that has no payoff, why include it at all? A fair point, but the opposite is also worth considering. Why does every scene need a payoff?

Does every action in your life have significance in the grand scheme of things? Why should literature be the same way? The fact is that Rob could've wound up on channel four just as easily as channel six. Most of the time we'd wind up on channel six ourselves. Very rarely do we stumble across such a life-changing event like Rob would've on channel four.

In short, that is the point. Everything we do has a consequence and many times we don't even realize that we've chosen something over something else. It is nearly impossible to fathom how many opportunities we've missed without realizing it.

Rob missed the opportunity of a lifetime simply because he stopped at channel six instead of going ahead to channel four. What prompted this? Fate? Destiny? God?

I prompted it. I controlled Rob's fate and he missed the opportunity. Why did I show you an alternative plot? Simply put, why don't you ever question the way a story turns out?

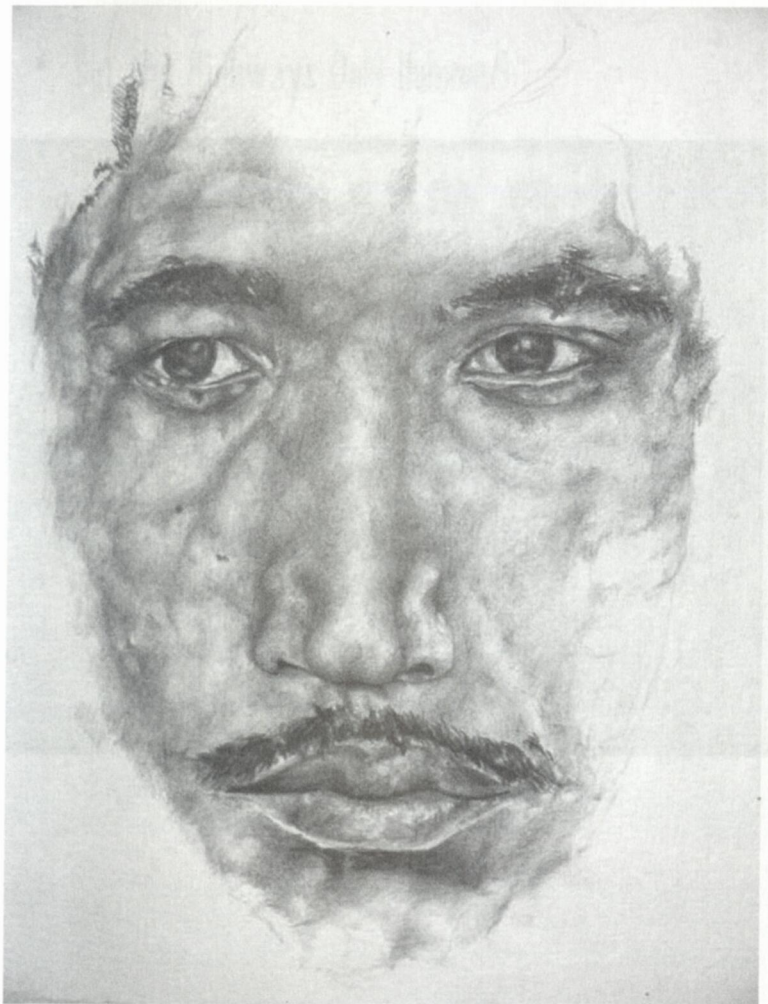
How often do you stop to think, "Well, why did it turn out that way?" or perhaps, "Isn't it a bit coincidental

that she stopped at that exact moment and wound up running into her long-lost friend?"

Stories thrive on plot and meaning. Without channel four, Rob's story has no meaning (some might argue that that is the meaning). But with channel four, Rob becomes a slave to the plot. He is simply a conduit to express some deeper meaning of it never being too late to change where your life is going.

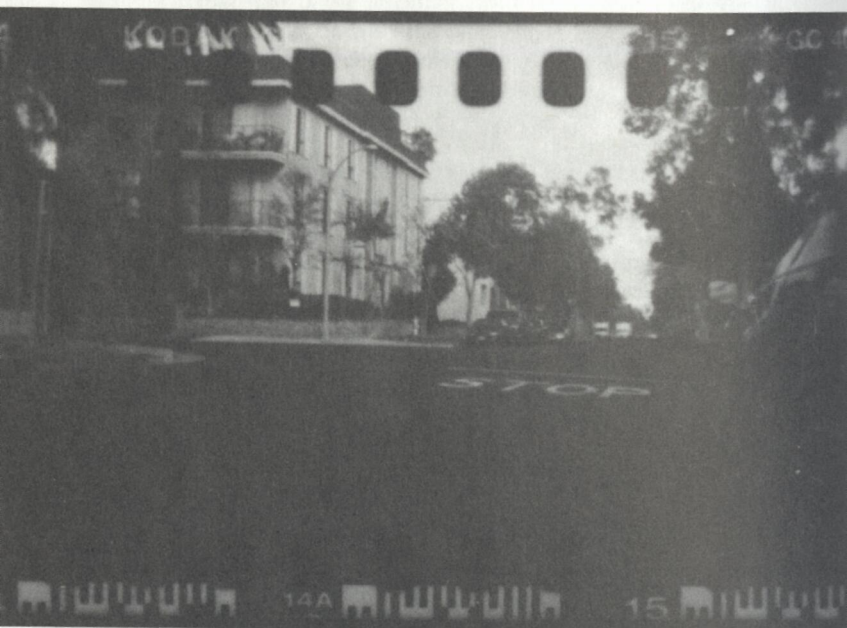
I purposefully had Rob miss the "plot" channel and wind up on the unimportant channel. We often do the same. And this "warning" of sorts is the real meaning.

So, where do your stories stop? Channel six or channel four?



Face

Sarah Albinson



On Charleville and Maple

Brent Clouse

But the Highways Only Hummed

I can honestly tell you that
the highways don't sleep at night.
No—they don't curl themselves up and
tuck in against roadside hills to rest their
dotted-white lines, weary of tires
crossing back and forth.

I know—because I was with those highways until
morning and I asked them if we could
rest against the hills, just for a moment, but
the highways only hummed beneath me.

Melanie Boronow



On Charleville **BLUE HOLE**

Nate Wheeler

Worm

A Melodramatic Tale of Sorrow and Woe

Abysmal dark, pouring rain. The cold and biting water arrows sting my face and I strain to see in front of me. It hurts too much. Blasted Indiana spring, the worms are out again. Adventurous and desperate, they brave the perilous sidewalk to escape their drowning homes of earth.

I bend down and the rain pelts my back. The worm at my feet inches forward, persevering to the drumbeat of the thunder. My finger reaches out and pushes him onward; he writhes away. Good, he's a feisty one. I scoop him up and watch as he explores the terrain of my hand.

He's nervous though, and as I pick up a second one, I see that worm excrement covers my hand. But I don't mind; it's just dirt anyway. When I bring the worms inside, a girl screams, and so I put the squirming invertebrates on the back porch. With a twinge of sadness I wonder if they'll make it until morning.

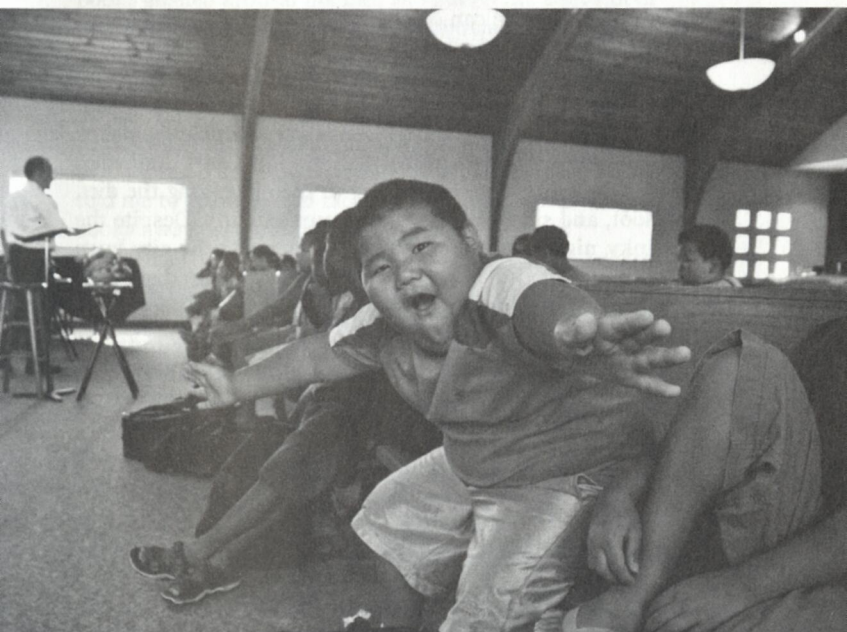
But in the morning the rain has collected in residual pools, small and stagnant. Drowned worms float there, dead and bloated, thwarted in their attempt to reach safety. By the end of the week the courageous caravans have become mere blots on the sidewalk, their very skins serving as their last sarcophagi.

Hannah Chupp

Midway Through Seventh Grade

I was flying
Kites with my cousins in Arkansas,
When I realized that everyone was against me
And no one was my friend.
I felt my soul falling
Into a kite-eating tree.
I have since decided
That kites,
And loneliness,
And hormones
Should be locked away
(Like guns,
and bullets,
and criminals)
In separate drawers.

James Daniels



I Am This Much Cool

Dustin Friesen

The Smile

Emily Morgan

Crushing the can on the cracked sidewalk in front of me, I pushed my balled-up hands farther into the pockets of my jacket, causing the black leather to stretch even more across my narrow back. I kicked its crushed form into the incoming traffic beside me. Vehicles whisked past me with such force that my long dark hair shot forward around me, swirling in the air among the dirt, soot, and smog. I clutched my purse tightly. Despite the inky night sky, thousands of lights made the city burn brighter at this hour than any other. In the distance I heard water lurching about, slapping the surface again and again with the force of the wind.

I glanced behind me quickly. My heart began to beat faster, and I quickened my pace to match. I breathed in, my nostrils burning from the acidic air. Cars clanked over manholes, and taxis started and stopped up and down the street. Surely I couldn't have been followed this far. I hooked a right down the next alleyway. The buildings loomed on both sides of me like shadowy bookends. It emptied out onto another street that looked the same. I sighed. I loved the city: too many people, too many towering buildings, too many places to lose oneself.

Although the night was darker than usual for an October night, the lights in restaurants, coffee shops, and bookstores shone with a warm yellow glow. I passed them, briefly debating whether or not to enter one. A car honked, and I jumped. I tried to calm my skittish nerves by taking deep breaths through my nose and out my mouth. It was pure craziness to think she would

have followed me this far, I tried to tell myself. Deciding to take a break and force myself to chill, I entered the Barnes & Noble on my left.

The aroma of cheap coffee and overpriced hardbound books gushed around my face as I pulled the heavy door open. The smell comforted me. I browsed through the aisles, absentmindedly picking up and then replacing books whose titles seemed interesting. I used to read all the time until she made me stop. My pulse began pacing again at the thought of her. I read to escape and to explore an exciting world that enveloped me. But she told me to grow up and face the real world. She took my books away and with them my dreams.

I walked over to the children's books section and gazed at the walls painted with smiling woodland creatures. Now that I had begun to think about her, I couldn't stop. I might have run from her, but she was trying to break into my mind. I could hear her voice circling inside my head, her laugh mocking me. "You want to what?"

"Write. You know, stories, articles, books?"

She scoffed. "Honey, have you ever listened to the stories you tell? You take twenty minutes to tell the beginning, and by that time no one wants to hear anything but 'the end.'" She laughed, and I laughed with her because if I didn't I thought I might cry.

"Barnes & Noble will be closing in fifteen minutes." The electronic voice jolted me into reality. Scanning for the nearest door, I made my exit. The warmth from the bookstore had made me realize just how cold the night was becoming. Maybe I should get a hotel room for the night, meet with Gabe tomorrow, and in the meantime figure out what I was going to do. Since that was the best plan I could come up with I sprinted across and up the street to a hotel.

"I need a room, please," I said to the man behind the check-in counter. He adjusted his thick, black-framed glasses.

"Um, let's see. Is it for just you?" he asked, peering over his lenses.

"Uh, yeah," I said with a tone of, do you see anyone with me?

He checked me into a room and gave me a fake smile. "Have a nice night."

I mumbled "you too," and walked toward the elevator. His smile reminded me of the smiles she used to give me. Picturing them made my stomach queasy. The elevator whisked me up. I hadn't always been under her control like this, like some kind of slave. She'd come into my life quietly. I couldn't quite remember when. However, I remember the first time she gave me one of those "smiles." I was looking straight at her, wearing my newly purchased outfit, hair done, and make-up painstakingly applied, wiped, and reapplied. I asked her how I looked. "Well, Casey Valentino has the same skirt, only a little newer." She smiled. "The shirt looks okay, but it would look better you if you were bigger up top, if you know what I mean." I knew what she meant. "The make-up is bit much and the hair is a little too flat, but your hair has always been a tad on the stringy side. But I love your shoes. You go have a good night, ok?"

The elevator dinged, bringing me back into the present, and I strode off quickly. Once in my room, I flung myself on the bed without as much as a look around. The smell of unfamiliarity surged around me until I felt like I couldn't breathe. I went to the window and tried to slide it open, but it stuck and wouldn't budge. I cursed and went back to the bed, turning on the T.V. as I went, hoping the noise would drown out her

voice, which was becoming louder in my head.

"Why aren't you good enough? You need to try harder. Nothing you do is going to amount to anything unless you start listening to me and shaping up your life!"

I clawed and fought with the bed covers until I was underneath them, my legs to my chest. I focused on the sound of my breath until all the noise in my head eventually pushed me over the edge of consciousness and drove me down into the safe escape of sleep.

I awoke to electronic buzzing by my head. I grabbed my cell phone. "Hello?" I croaked.

"Hey, you're still meeting me at the Chinese place for lunch right? You promised, remember?"

"Oh, Gabe, yeah," I pushed the hair out of my eyes and kicked my legs free from the tangle of blankets. "I'm still coming. What time is it?"

"It's eleven-thirty. Did you just wake up?" I started to answer. "You've still got time," he said. "Just meet me over here in an hour or so. Is that cool?"

"Yeah, I'll see you then."

I walked through the nippy air, shivering and wishing I had blow dried my hair. The closer I got to the restaurant the more I slowed my pace. It's not that I didn't want to see Gabe; I just didn't want to have to sit through grilling like some delinquent brought in for questioning. Oh, he would do it out of genuine concern for me, but it was still unbearable. I did a quick surveillance around me. What was wrong with me? I chided myself; she wasn't here, but I felt like any minute she would jump out in front of me and yell, "Gotcha!"

I saw him even before I walked into the restaurant. He smiled at me so kindly that I just wanted to cry and spill my guts before him. But I didn't. I smiled and sat.

"It's been so long since I've seen you!" he said, his lips

THE INFAMOUS RED LINE

Brad Nickerson

parting to show his white teeth all the way back to his molars. "How have you really been?"

"I've been fine. How about you? How is work?"

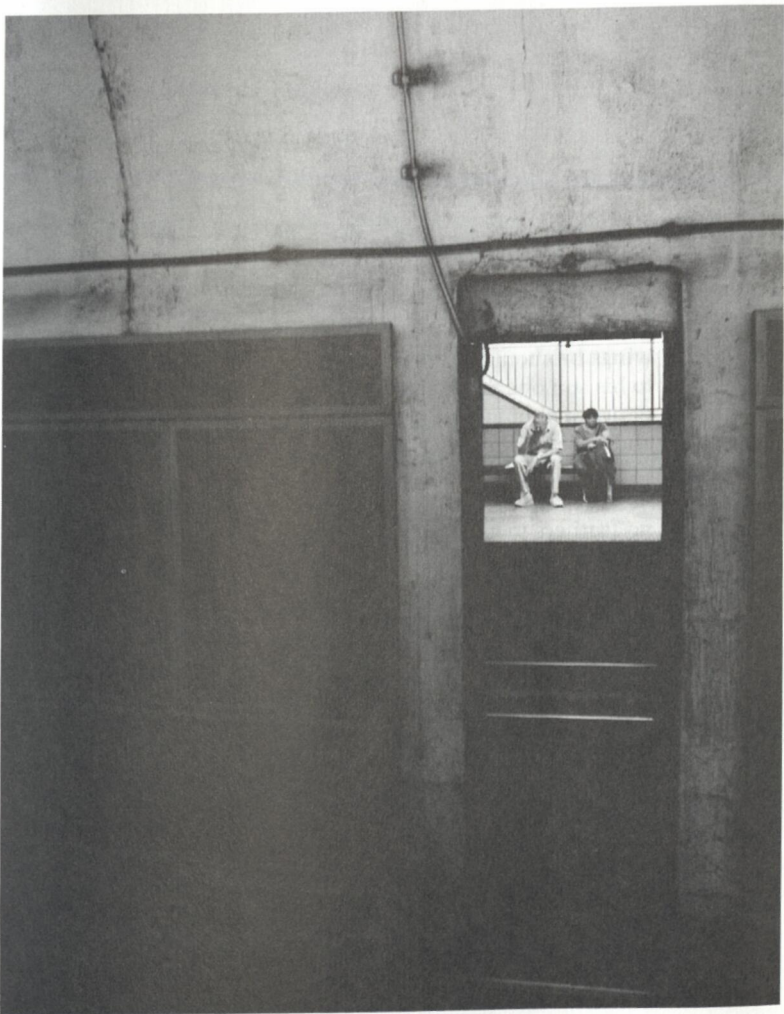
"Oh, it's great!" He leaned back in his chair, his strong arms flexing as he stretched and resituated himself. "Lots of traveling around and meeting great people. Working hard and loving every minute of it."

"Yeah, for sure. Traveling's the best."

Concern flickered across his face. "When are you going to go home? Your family is concerned about you, and your friends don't understand this distance. What's happening? You can tell me. You know I'm here for you."

I shifted, my eyes darting around, noting every exit in the restaurant. His puppy-dog eyes continued to search my face. "I have to go to the ladies' room. I'll be right back."

He leaned back and sighed. I walked quickly to the bathroom. No one was in there, thank God. I bent over the sink and gripped the edge until my knuckles turned white. Sweat lingered on my forehead. I slowly lifted my head and found myself staring directly into her face. I gasped. She gasped, too. Were you so foolish as to think there was anywhere you could run where I wouldn't find you? Then slowly, looking into her eyes framed by dark stringy hair, she lifted her lips into a smile.



THE INFAMOUS RED LINE

Brad Nickerson

Dreams of Icarus

1:

Daedalus

In a windowless castle
in the Isles of Icaria
Daedalus builds his wings:
wings he should have given
to his son one fateful day,
wings of shimmering gold
and self-winding clockwork.

no wax to melt,
no feathers to burn,
no reliance on fragile human strength—
for one cannot stop a child
from flying too high,
but one can give him stronger wings

Daedalus spent twenty lonely years
constructing those clockwork toys,
his eyes slowly growing dim
from hiding from the sun.

Every day his fingers tremble a little more
as he perfects the wings
to prevent his son from falling.
Every night he lies in bed
to fall beneath the waves
to join his son in an endless darkness.

James Daniels



THE INTIMOUS RED LINE

Brad Robinson

2:

Icarus, Falling

When the wax was melting
and you struggled
to stay aloft
you weren't trying
to not fall
no, you were trying
(even then!)
to reach the sun.

3:

Instructions to reach the ocean floor

For sailors:	by sirens
For Icarus:	by flames
For gods:	by desire
For saints:	by disbelief



Smoke

Rachel Nolan

Fishing With Grandpa

dusty and dry
and cream-puff colored
their darkened faces
seemed to smile—
not like earthworms,
always slick and slinking
and brown

Andrea Walker

i figured they'd drown
or else get eaten
and the only way
to save them
was to shove them
through the boat's
thin welding-cracks

looking back, i realize
i killed all five
and that, entrapped,
they had no chance to die
a natural mealworm death

you were silent
as i killed mealworms
on your lake
and you were silent
as you lay on that bed
in a starch white hospital gown
as your daughters' eyes drowned

and what i wouldn't have given
for that room to smell like fishing

One of Many

Christopher Gatti

or tractor rides
or shooting muskrats
instead of formaldehyde
and caskets

mealworms are bred to die, i guess.
did you have to die, too?

on your lake
and you were there
as you lay on that bed
in a starch white hospital gown
as your laughter eyes dimmed

and what i wouldn't have given
for that room to smell like fish

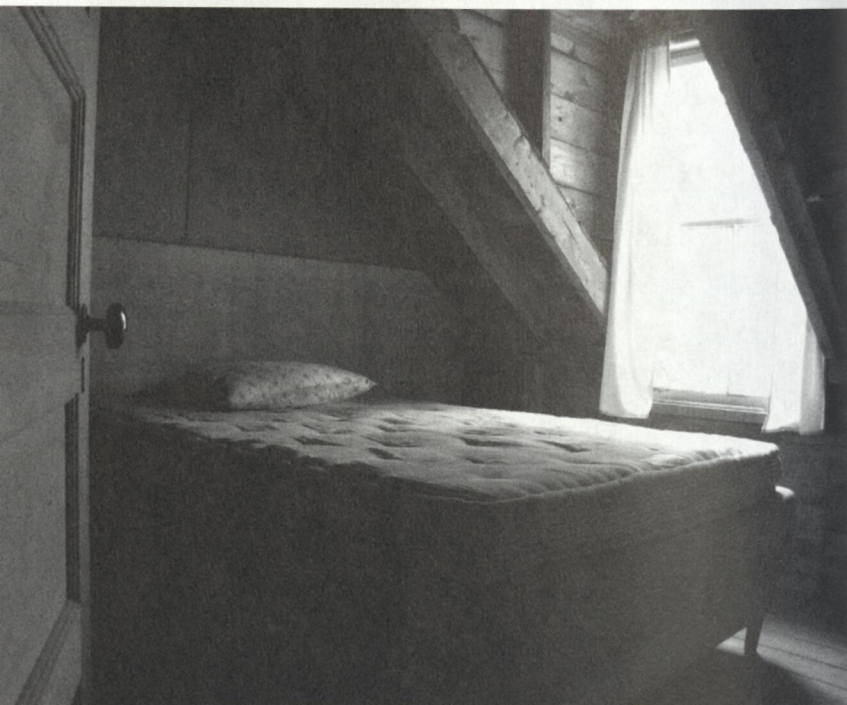
Smoke

Rachel Nolan



One of Many

Christina Gatti



ynsm to Here
Rachel Tobin

PAPER THIN WALLS

I had only gotten back from school five minutes ago and I was already in my closet-sized room lying in my bed, staring up at the stains on the ceiling. I would have avoided it longer if I could have, coming home that is. I hated it there, but if I had stayed out any later, I might not have made it back alive.

I wish I was yelled at when I came home to apartment 313. He doesn't even look away from the television when I close the front door behind me, and she is too drugged up to even know that I walked into the room. Being ignored is so much worse than being yelled at. If they would only say something, something like, "It's dangerous being outside after dark!"—even that small amount of worry would be better than this silence; at least I would know they care. The only thing I hear as I trudge down the hall to my room is the television saying something about another crackbrained murderer killing yet another innocent victim.

My room is the furthest down the hall; it shares a wall with the empty apartment next to us and it's the only thing in this building that I like in the slightest. It's quiet and I can forget about all the worries that have built up in me. I have a few comic books stacked up in the corner that I have read through several times, maybe I can get a new one next month. I should just go to sleep; it's too dark to read now anyways. From where I lay, I can see the damp spots on the ceiling where the water drips through whenever the person on the floor above takes a shower; the paint looks like it's peeling off the walls as well. All that's left to do before I sleep is prayers.

Joshua Larkin

"God, why would you put me in such a miserable place? My parents don't care about me and I have no friends. You're the only one I can talk to. I pray and read my Bible everyday, so why doesn't life get better?"

"Because my dear child, sin causes pain for everyone. No one can escape its evil," God answered in a deep voice. "Even just today, a man was murdered coming home from work. He was a good man with a family that loved him. He didn't do anything terrible to deserve death any more than anyone else."

I wondered if my dad could ever hear me talking to God or if anyone else ever talked to God like this. I figured out it wasn't a normal thing after I tried telling one of my teachers about it once. After awhile, he just smiled and walked away. At least he smiled, that's more than what most people give me.

"But don't we all deserve death because of sin?" I asked.

"Yes, the wages of sin is death. No one can stand before me and be unclean of sin. I am perfect, and so is my justice. All have fallen short of my glory."

"So if we are all sinners, and You can't stand sin, why don't You just kill us all and get it over with?" I asked solemnly. Usually my prayers aren't so morbid, but today was worse than most days and the thought of everyone having the same fate as me was comforting in a dark and hopeless sort of way.

"I'm working on it."

"Do you know when I'm going to die?" I have no idea why I asked this question, but for whatever reason I couldn't help myself. Subconsciously I must have been hoping to hear something like, 'not for a long time my child, I have great plans for you, just endure this suffering a little longer and you will see what I have in store.' As the silence drew on I quietly hoped for such

loving words. Then I heard Him speak.

“Your life will end in twenty-one hours.”

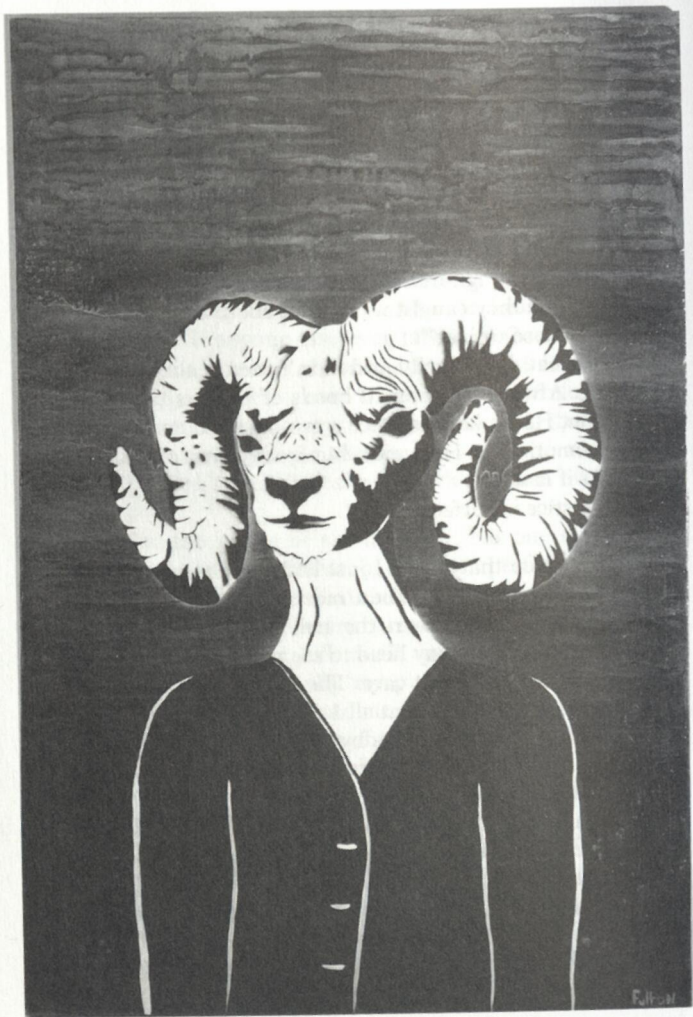
First there was silence, this must be a joke, this can't be real. I wanted to laugh, I wanted God to laugh... nothing. Then my hysteria turned to anger, all the anger I had buried inside of me since I was too young to remember.

“Why?” I shouted as I sprang upright, “Why should I die while my pitiful excuses for parents live? What about my teachers who ignored me and the kids who beat me up every time they caught me? What about them? How could you be so unjust?”

I was breathing heavily and didn't even realize I was shouting. After what seemed hours of just waiting for an answer, He spoke. His voice was not raised and there was no emotion in His voice, but it held just as much power as if it was.

“My justice is perfect.”

I didn't sleep that night; I just laid there staring into nothingness in silence. When morning came, I got up and walked straight down the hall and out the door without even turning my head to see my parents for the last time. They wouldn't care. The rest of the day flew past my eyes, and I felt that all I could do was watch it pass. I had no one to say goodbye to, no one who would care; besides, there was no reason to fight fate. As I walked back home, I realized that I was approaching my final minutes. It felt surreal and I began to wonder how it would end when I was stopped by a police officer who was blocking the entrance to my apartment building. He told me that they had finally apprehended the serial killer that we had heard about all over the news and that they were clearing out his hideout in apartment 312.



SANCTIFIED BODY

Jacob Fulton

A MINOR THOUGHT LASTING 10 SECONDS

I say bad things and think worse things but the things I think are so much more real that I can't ignore their fire fly call and the scary way they gnaw at the sinew of my mind and take out what is not mine and blow up trade towers from inside their own private city in the left hemisphere.

Josh Giuliano

I'm not a terrorist, I just terrorize.

BLOOD ON THE VELVET

The last man on earth heard a knock at the door.

Tap, tap, tap.

His head jerked as he woke, the dream still bright in his mind. His eyes twitched to narrow slits and his thin, pale hands tightened on the knife in his lap. Veins, outlined in sharp relief, showed against the skin of his arms.

Night hadn't yet lifted. Lurid moonlight spilled through the splintered window above his head, but the sky was starless. Pervasive silence thickened the air.

Tap, tap, tap.

They were at the door? This wasn't right. The creatures kept to their caves until daybreak, until the sky was bloody with dawn-light. And even when they walked beneath the moon, with their fangs as white as bone, they never approached his home. It was his fortress.

So what had come to call?

Tap, tap, tap—like a spider clicking its jaws—*tap, tap, tap.*

But the beasts didn't come at this hour. They never had...they knew better than to attack his fortress. They couldn't enter. He was safe here.

It wasn't the beasts. It couldn't be. But what else was there?

And the last man on earth allowed himself to wonder for just a moment: *What if...?*

Never. Impossible.

But what if?

You're a fool for thinking it, and a dead one, if you let

Chandler Birch

First Place
Prose

it in.

But the last man on earth stood. His movement was hushed, his breathing light, in spite of the frenzied thumping of his heart. The carpet beneath his bare feet swallowed the sound of his steps, though the pounding of blood in his ears sounded like an elephant's footsteps.

The knife in his hand was a comfort. Not half as comforting as the things on his belt—his checkmate, if the beasts ever caught him—but a comfort nonetheless. The handle was warm against his palm, slightly damp with sweat, but the blade was cold as ever, cold as death. Cold as night and ice, as cold as the touch of a corpse.

Tap, tap, tap.

Faster now, as if it were anxious. Eager, perhaps? Nervous? Scared?

Or perhaps thirsty. Like the spider....

He shifted his grip on the knife as he stared at the door. His pulse pounded on his ears, more insistent than the knocks, thumping frantically. *Don't do it, don't let it in.*

But he wouldn't be letting it in, only keeping it out....

Quiet as a wraith, he slid the bolt from its hole. *Tap, tap, tap.* His jaw locked and he raised the knife above his head as, with utmost care, he twisted the knob.

He was ready for the door to crash open, ready for the skinless creatures with pointed teeth and lidless yellow eyes. His muscles tightened, ready to strike, ready for the emaciated red-jawed monsters, ready to slash at their laughing, hollow skulls. But they weren't there.

He stood still for a moment. He couldn't be seeing this right. Surely he was dreaming still.

It was *another man*.

The knife slipped between his fingers and stuck in the floor, and his mouth fell open soundlessly. Breath froze in his chest; for a moment, it felt as if his heart had

stopped beating. *How can this be?*

And the man was *smiling*.

The visitor rushed forward and wrapped the other man in long arms, so quick that the last man on earth stumbled backwards.

"Hiram!" he cried. "Hiram, my brother, it has been too long!"

The last man on earth backed away. Who was this? Where had he come from?

And why had he said "brother"?

The visitor didn't notice Hiram's hesitation, or his shock. The last man on earth heard the visitor's footsteps pass him by, and then felt the visitor's hand on his shoulder.

His skin is warm, the man thought.

"Hiram? Are you all right?"

But Hiram did not answer; he only closed the door and turned to face the Other Man.

The Other Man on earth. *I am not the last*. The thought was so foreign.

"Of course you're not all right," said the visitor, said his brother, said the Other Man on earth. "Of course you're not." And the Other Man hugged him again.

"I cried when I heard about Allison," the Other Man said as he let Hiram go. "It wasn't fair."

He knows of Allison?

The Other Man pulled him farther into the house and left him to stand alone on the carpet. It seemed only an instant later that the Other Man returned. In his hands was a decanter of red wine. Hiram couldn't remember ever seeing it before, but he couldn't remember much of anything right now.

"It'll be okay, Hiram," said the Other Man. "Come, and sit. We have so much to talk about."

Hiram came, and sat, and realized how very, very tired

he was. He looked up at the window, with its spider web cracks, and his throat tightened. How many nights had he sat here, alone, sharpening his knife and staring at the sable sky? How many nights had he spent frozen in place, with the past dancing behind his eyes, with its blood and screams?

He had been alone so long. So very long.

Hiram wanted to cry, but he had long ago lost the knowing of it. "Allison..."

The Other Man held up a glass of wine. Hiram found himself holding the decanter, and a glass. "I understand, Hiram. When they came and told me...it wasn't your fault, little brother. You know that?"

Hiram couldn't speak in return. It had been many months since he'd spoken. Or years? He hadn't counted. Why would he? Words need an audience.

"It's alright," said the Other Man. "Sadness takes a while." He sipped at the red red wine. "Nothing drowns sadness like this, though. There's nothing quite like the red stuff."

And as he looked at the last man on earth over the rim of his glass, his eyes caught the moonlight and turned as red as blood.

For a breath, the last true man on earth was still and silent, as his hopes crumbled.

Then, all at once, the bottle of wine crashed into the Not-Man's head and broke open. The Not-Man sucked in a breath as he fell to the floor. Glass shattered on the ground.

The last of the human race got on his knees beside the body of the Not-Man, and looked at his hungry red eyes, the eyes that haunted him, the eyes that watched him when he slept. Something mad took hold of him, and his hand pressed the jagged edges of the broken bottle against the Not-Man's neck. Red—wine or blood,

he didn't care—leaked from the Not-Man's temple and neck, and then from its chest and its stomach, as the last man on earth stabbed the razor glass into the corpse rhythmically, methodically. All the while, he stared into the glassy red eyes of the Not-Man, and slowly they dimmed.

"Die, die, die," he muttered, every time the sharp edges cut through the Not-Man's skin. The Not-Man tried to speak, but there was nothing to hear it.

And then it was done, and the sky was as red as the floor, as red as the wine, as red red red as the Not-Man's blood. Dawn.

The last man on earth locked his doors and went to bed. His shirt had turned crimson, and his hands were painted with blood. But he didn't see that; he could hardly see at all.

They came for him three days later—the beasts. They came by day, with their claws and their red red mouths and their strong hands, and the teeth that they stuck in him so that he slept deeply when they came. He never had a chance to kill them—not even one. They carried him to their caves, and they spoke at him in threats, as if he could understand them. He never spoke, but for once:

"For Allison."

The following report was submitted to court review at the trial of Hiram Nance. The accused was unable to attend the trial.

"Psychiatric reports suggest that Hiram Nance is clinically insane, and has been since the brutal murder of his pregnant wife, Allison Nance. Due to his psychosis, he is convinced that he is the last human being alive—all others falling victim to 'monsters' which then sought to kill him as well. Relieving him of the delusion is impossible, as he does not seem to recognize human speech.

"Finally, according to police, he was found wearing a belt loaded with live explosives, and his behavior following his incarceration has further proven him to be an irreconcilable danger to society."

On August 13th, 1978, ten weeks after the death of his wife and eight weeks after the death of his brother, Hiram Nance was put to death by court order. He was 46.

FISHERS OF MEN

Jessie R. Day

Animal Training

I bare my teeth.
In this cosmetic age
Daggers can be disguised as smiles
With porcelain polish.
The heart growling
Mute under seven layers of skin.
Still, I'd never bite
No risk is worth living the rest of life
On a shock collar.
Throw me the frisbee,
I'll show you a trick
Rewarded with bones
I'll bury.

Shannon Kaphaem



FISHERS OF MEN

Jessie Riley



MEM All Is Well

Alexander Moore

Of Birds and Bones

She has wrists like birds' claws,
too thin to lift her red bracelets.
I think of snapping twigs.

Like a swan searching for
serenity lost,
she perches on chair arms
and davenport.

Wings clipped, tail-feathers pulled,
she smiles as if the expression
can banish fears
and uncontrolled realities.

Her lips are as dry as scattered leaves;
her eyes are timid, watchful, speaking things
quietly wild.

Once, she was strong.

Now, she cannot hear me say,
"I love you—you're beautiful—don't do this."

It will not be tomorrow, but soon
my words will mean no more
than the gnarled, thorny arms of a blushing rose
covering an old grave.

Corinne Hill



Ice In His Veins

Morgan Hunt

AUSCHWITZ

I walk beneath the black iron gateway
Arbeit Macht Frei
Work Makes Us Free
And cold anger settles like mercury in my gut
Horror perches on my shoulder
whispers in my ear
as I walk the death-paths of millions
And I peep into the long low houses
that absolutely no one called home
Finally, I immerse myself into the hell of the gas chamber
I stand near the wall while the guides drone on
in casual tones about what happened here
I can't blame them
How could they let themselves feel the grief
on every tour, quarter past the hour
But to my left, I hear a low mutter
"Mein Gott..."
I want to see the man beside me
to know that he suffers as I do
but I can't take my eyes off the scratches in the wall
Nails dragging down the unyielding metal
No one heeding the cry, "Mein Gott!"
When I step out of that room
[They didn't step out]
The sun is shining
Breaking through the clouds with perseverance
Was this the freedom they earned?
Clawing, screaming, gasping
into the sunny sky
Carried along as black smoke on the wind

Valerie Prescott



Ice In His Veins

Morgan Hunt

A ROPE MIGHT COME LATER

Mary Tait

My breath is heavy and I'm ready to be over with this all. I hear the splintering crack as the hatchet hits its mark. I swing again and the drawer splits open. I thrust my hand into the splintered mouth I've created and pull out the item I hate so much. The splinters prick me, drawing claw marks along the stretch of my arm and tearing at my sleeve. But I don't care. I'm getting rid of it right now.

I run down two sets of stairs, my lungs groaning from the unusual movement of my body. I clutch the object of sin in my hand, its smooth face gnawing despair into my flesh and bones. I burst through the screen door and keep running. Leaves crack and crunch with every step. But I don't hear leaves. I hear bones. Rows of trees flee past and I stop near the tree where Grandpa used to have a swing tied to one of the high branches. I can barely hold it any longer. I feel its venom entering my mind. I throw it into the grove of trees—the trees near the little river—and watch it fly up and out of sight, its golden sides glinting in the autumn sun.

I stand for a long time. I'm breathing hard from the run. Even at fifty-five I'm wearing out far too fast. I stare at my hands, covered in welts from the drawer's wooden spines. I feel sick. I don't know if the welts are painful. All I know is that I feel the same. I can't separate myself from it. It's too late. I'm poisoned.

When he's little, a kid doesn't care about an inheritance. An inheritance takes too long to get. All he cares about is what he wants and gets right then and

there. My grandfather willed me his apple orchard. He gave my brother his shiny gold-coated pocket watch with his initials, "J.A.E." engraved on the back. The watch I always wanted.

I loved the apple orchard, but what can a ten-year-old boy do with one? My brother was named after my grandfather, so it was just natural that he should give the pocket watch to him. I shouldn't have cared about that stupid watch, and should have been thankful for the orchard. Grandfather always said I had a knack for taking care of it. But when I saw my brother walking around and showing off the pocket watch I wanted, any appreciation for the orchard vanished. I wanted that blasted watch more than anything. I felt as though my happiness teetered on the edge of a precipice as long as that watch was in my brother's hands. I was so desperate I even offered to exchange my inheritance for his dumb watch. But even he saw the foolishness in that and refused. I should have left it at that.

But I didn't.

One particularly muggy spring day, my brother and I were walking through the woods, which wasn't usual for us. It had been raining for several days, leaving the mud setting just to get churned like butter by our new brown shoes. I can remember that the mist that day was thick enough to shorten our vision, but thin enough to let colors reach our eyes. What few colors there were to see. Though it was springtime, everything looked unusually dead, as if the region had been slaughtered by the winter. Or maybe there were colors, and I just didn't see them because I was so focused on that watch...that stupid, stupid watch.

There was a little bridge that went over a river on part of our usual walking route. Deciding to rest, we stopped on the bridge, each looking over and peeking over the

side down at the water, which had long ago passed its normal height and now danced precariously but a few feet beneath the arch of the bridge. I reached over and stuck out my hand, letting the spray from the water lap at my fingers. I quickly pulled it up when I realized that the water was brown and making my hands dirty. I wiped it off on my wool pants, leaving nothing but tiny wet marks visible on the fabric.

I looked over at Jacob. He had taken out the watch and was looking at it like he usually did. I felt frustration start to prick me, but I did my best to remain "behaved." I walked over to him. "Hey Jacob, can I see the watch?"

He was only eight at the time (eight years young) but he was better mannered than I ever was. He looked at it, then back at me. "No, because you wouldn't give it back last time."

"I'll give it back, I promise. That was just because I had a bad day at school," I lied.

Jacob shook his head. "No, I don't want you to drop it in the water," he said quickly, slipping it into his pocket, making sure the chain was tied to the belt of his pants.

I frowned. "I'm not clumsy, I'll be careful with it," I promised, slipping over and reaching for it.

Jacob stepped back. "No. When we get home. I'll let you see it then."

But I wouldn't have it. I reached out and managed to grab it from his pocket, and tried pulling it from his belt loop. Naturally, he squirmed and pulled back away from me. Why I was so determined to get that watch, I still don't understand. Maybe it was that I wanted to show him that I still had power over him, even if he got the special stuff from Grandpa, and was named after him, even if he had Mama and Papa on his side. I was still stronger. I was two years older and one of the biggest boys in my class at school, so when the chain snapped it

was natural that I would fall back to the ground. I caught myself before I totally collapsed.

Jacob was small for his age, so it was natural that he would fly back after how hard he'd been tugging on the chain. It was just natural that with the bridgeboards slickly polished with rain, he would slide back further. It was just natural that when the back of his skinny shins hit the low stone borders his legs would stop moving back but that the rest of him would keep going. It was just natural for gravity to take effect. It was just natural for the river that lapped my fingers to swallow my brother whole.

It took me a moment to realize what had happened. "Jacob?" I called, waiting for his answer. Hoping for an answer.

Only the rumblings of the satisfied river permeated the silence.

"JACOB!" I screamed this time, running to the edge where he had fallen. I looked down, but saw only the rippling muscles of the thing that had consumed my brother. I quickly ran to the other side and screamed again. "JACOB! JACOB!" Still the same answer came.

It is often said that when people are still, they are still like stone, like a statue. But that here would be an understatement. I became stone. I didn't breathe. I don't know if any thoughts passed through my mind, if any image was perceived, or if any smell of that stinking river and the spray that was beginning to coat my skin was realized. I only sensed the sound of the river's gargling (or was it salivating). Perhaps that one sense was the only part of my humanity left. It felt like it was, but even this was questionable. When I gained motion again, I ran. I ran the fastest I have ever run in my life.

I don't remember much. I can remember slipping at one point and skinning my knee on some of the teeth

of the river, tearing my pants and staining them with dirt, blood, and the river's brown foaming saliva. I can remember thinking how much I hated this river. I hated it. I can remember coming to a steep slope and seeing where the river flooded out over a stretch of flat land, and I wondered if I ever would see Jacob again. I crawled down the slope, and walked along the water. It was calmer here, satisfied and tired from the miles it had run for so long. It hovered over the now swampy earth, ready to rush off again at any moment. I remember at one point noticing something floating in the water, rather large and brown, bobbing up and down, up and down. I climbed a fallen tree to get a better look, my gut knotting into a mass of needlework. But it was just the corpse of a tree. I saw another thing...it was white. I shifted from foot to foot, wondering if the white was my brother's skin. I hoped it wasn't. No, it was just a whitewashed fence that had been torn from a field some miles up the river and carried here to this burial ground. I noticed something thrust into the mud as I continued to watch. The object's gray circular side projected from the muck like a crudely configured tombstone. I picked it up and found that it was Jacob's hat. I looked around and called his name again, and I prayed this time my call would be answered.

The language of the dead was my only reply. The sound burned my ears. No animal stirred, besides that beast that some called the river.

I wandered a long time and eventually it became very dark, so I started to walk back towards the bridge, along the back of the ever-flowing current. I don't remember everything that happened next, but my papa found me, along with a few of my neighbors. I don't know how honest I was when I told what happened. I was cold, wet, and miserable and just wanted to go home and sit

by the fire. I was taken home while my papa searched with a few others. My mama was very happy to see me, and quickly washed me and put me to bed. I was exhausted, and instantly tumbled into sleep. Sometime later that night I woke up to the sound of wailing in another part of the house. I hurried downstairs and saw a faint light coming out of one of the rooms. I crept over and peeked in. The room was coated in shadows, but clear as day was the pale yet mud-stained face of Jacob. I knew without a doubt he was gone. The river had eaten him. I stared at that precious face, and I saw a mixture of both peace and betrayal. The river had eaten him. And I was the one who had fed it. A chill of pain and terror swept over me and I rushed upstairs to my room where I plunged into bed and wrapped my covers around me to cut away the world.

The next morning I remember my mama leaning down and whispering to me that Jacob had drowned. We had a funeral the following day. I was able to get out of school for a week. I got a room to myself. And I even got the pocket watch...that blasted pocket watch.

My brother is dead. I fed him to the river and killed him.

I carry the ladder back to the tree with the swing set. I can't decide if it belongs there or not. The welts on my hand send signals to my brain that the wood ladder needs to be sanded. Leaning it against the tree, I stare up at the branch I've seen so many times before.

Grandfather had tied a swing to that branch—the stub of rope still is there—and Jacob and I used to swing on it whenever we came over. It was the perfect branch to hang from, jutting out from the trunk in almost a perfect ninety-degree angle. One could swing so easily. The branch was thick and strong and the wind could blow

you and you'd sway back and forth, back and forth...

I spit and proceed to the shed where the rope and the tools are. I unlock the shed, wondering why I even bother to lock it when the wood is so rotten you could kick it in and take whatever you wanted. The fragrance of the place assaults my nostrils as I enter. I grope about and find my wheelbarrow and tools. I wish I could go back to the time when Adam ate that apple and the ground got cursed so I could stop him from doing wrong, so I wouldn't have to work on this orchard so hard. Why couldn't the fool have been thankful for what he was given and left it at that?

The sickening sensation creeps into me as I realize what I said. I want to vomit, but I can't. There has never been a day I haven't thought of the day the river swallowed my brother. The day I killed him.

I snatch the handles of the wheelbarrow and roll it out toward the ranks of trees I inherited from my grandfather. I love the orchard. I always did. Then why did I ever want to give it away? Oh yeah, because a ten-year-old can't do anything with an apple orchard. I curse. I'm not sure if I curse myself or the weeds or the watch. But I curse. I curse with sickly words that have long ago lost their meaning because I know they can never express just what I think about myself.

The day drags on. At long last my head rests on my pillow. I stare at the wooden ceiling, my eyes following the lines of the floorboards and every once in a while getting caught in a knot. There is one knot I always watch, the one right above my head. It reminds me of the tree. And sometimes I think I see it swaying in the dark void I sleep in. Tonight I don't really notice. Not even the soft sheets can sooth my aching hands. It's a mess up there. I should clean it up tomorrow.

I sense myself falling in my sleep and dream of Jacob

swinging under the tree in the orchard. Black fog is everywhere. I hear a roar and the river emerges from the woods, its water flowing and swirling into a set of jaws paired with blood red eyes. It sweeps across the orchard and I run through the trees, but I never get close. My salty sweat trickles down my face, and stings the cuts on my arms. I can't get any closer. I reach out toward my brother, I scream, but the river pounces on him and gulps him down like I guzzle a beer. My eyes widen and I freeze as the beast turns my way, salivating water and blood. I have to run now. My heart stops when I realize I can't go anywhere. The trees have entwined themselves into a net and I'm entangled in them, screaming, trying to break free. Blood courses through my limbs, trying to force me forward but I get shoved back closer to the river. I hear the river's roar and my heart is pierced by a shriek from my brother.

I wake up. Look at the clock. It's morning. Time to get going. I grope out of bed, and I realize my pajamas are cemented to my skin from the dried sweat. I consider a shower then hold back, my heartbeat revived as I imagine the sound of water pouring from the spout. I'll take a shower later. Right now I will go and make myself breakfast.

I avoid my reflection as I tramp down a level to the kitchen. I make eggs and bacon for breakfast, the usual. I finish an egg carton and proceed to toss it in the trash. I hear it land as it clangs against bottles and cans, making a hollow harmonious symphony. I make sure that the water in the sink is low as I begin to wash the dishes, and my eyes wander out the window and slink to the old swinging tree. My eyes rest there for a few minutes and I let the water continue to run. When I feel prunes instead of fingers I remember that I need to go fix the mess I made yesterday.

I ascend to the attic. Needle-like shafts litter the floor, and I am thankful for my good boots. The hatchet is still lodged in the main frame of the dresser and I tenderly remove it. I decide that I will chop it up for firewood, and contrive a way to drag it downstairs and outside where I can finish the job. The process takes a while but I finally get it down to the back yard. I sliced several layers of wallpaper on the way, but right now I don't care. I enter the reeking shed to find the saw. My eyes see the rope and I study it for a moment, and it reminds me of the curves of the river...the river that ate my brother. I killed him.

I grab the saw and head back to the dresser and begin to cut. I had thrown the drawer key into the river long ago. I didn't want to see the watch again. I pull two boards apart with a sudden spurt of strength as I boil inside. I had locked it away, but I couldn't have it in the house anymore. I killed it. I notice a paper in the drawer and I pull it out.

I don't remember this note. But now I do. It is from my dad before he died. I told him that I killed Jacob. I told him everything that happened. I felt cold when he didn't say anything. He died that night, but he left this note. I hate the note. It makes me angry. It is only three words. Three words that repulse me. "I forgive you." I tremble and shove the paper in my pocket and continue cutting. My hands shake, and I try to steady them. But it doesn't work.

I can't be forgiven. I killed his son. He didn't mean it. He couldn't have. Even if he did, I know what I did. I know that blood stains my hands; it stains my mind. I am the vilest creature alive. I now tremble so much I take a break and head inside for a drink. I grab a bottle, then a second and seat myself on the front porch, the dismembered drawer splattered before me. I feel like a

Roman Emperor viewing the end of a gladiator battle.
But who won?

I have never had a woman. Ever. No kids. Not a point to my name. It's just the blasted apple orchard and me. Forty-five years from that cursed day and I haven't learned to live with anyone. Not even myself. I throw down the first bottle and it applauds what has been done this day. I start on the second bottle. I am hopeless. I will never be able to find it. I'm the loser in this battle. But I must continue to fight. I will never win, but still I am forced to fight against my will. I can't see victory. I never will.

The second bottle echoes the first and I go and cut wood again. The job is rhythmic, and I find myself suddenly aware that I have finished my task. My mind has left me several times this week. Whenever it comes back I always ask myself what the whole point is. I stride through the orchard past the ranks to the swing tree.

I stare up at the rope stump that sways in the wind, back and forth, back and forth.

Dad could forgive me, I couldn't. I run my welted hand against the ladder and feel some open and ooze. I am like one of those welts. I turn back towards the shed and my mind runs over the note I hear crinkling in my pocket. My father lost my brother too. He understood the pain of loss. But he didn't understand what I feel now. I am so deep in my thoughts again that I emerge in the decaying shed with no memory of the walk here.

He forgave me. Blast it all, he should have known better. I caused him pain. I put myself through pain. I curse as I go and drag the wheelbarrow from the depths of the hollow. But he forgave me anyway. I remember now why I hid the note with the watch. I never want to think about all this. I killed my brother. He can't forgive me.

WAYS OF LIFE

Alexander Moore

I grab the rope and toss it into the wheelbarrow. The rope uncoils and slithers down amid the web of weed-whackers and shovels. I prepare to leave.

But something inside me tells me to wait. It pokes at me. I hate that note. My gut says it wants me to think about it again. I don't want to. I'm sick of all this. But for some reason, I oblige. I shove the wheelbarrow back into the shed and force the tools back in their places. I pick up the rope last and coil it, setting it on the shelf. What's another day of torment compared to forty-five years?

I decide to go to the house and think it over. I finger the note in my pocket as I step outside into the dim morning light. There's a mist so I can't see around me, but I can see the sunlight. I will go now and read the note. I need a day off anyway. I move to close the door and glance one more time at the rope. Do I really need it?

I close and lock the shed, tucking the key beside the note. I breathe deeply.

Maybe later.



WAYS OF LIFE

Alexander Moore

For An Acquaintance Who Lost A Friend

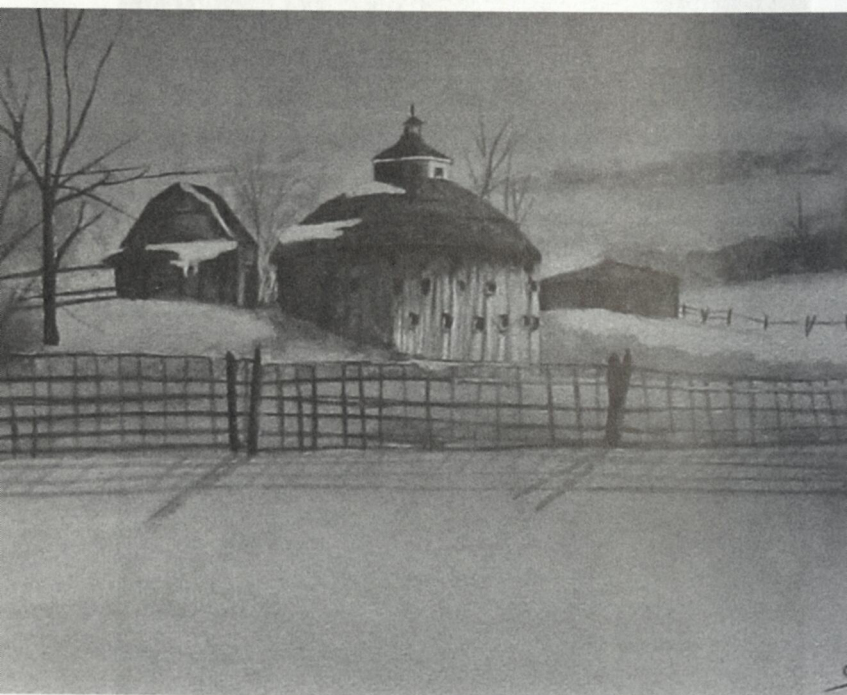
James Daniels

Our words are vigilantes
sent out into that dark night
to capture Death
and sever his hands.
We sent those words
to free you,
but found you held
by a thing that words cannot touch.
And our words are not antivenom,
our words are not feathered with hope.
Our words are broken toys,
and beautiful, useless trinkets.
We mock our words,
for in the face of your unimaginable loss
our sincerest sympathies
are worse than worthless;
they parody your pain.



Nature Burns Nature, Man Burns Man

Dustin Friesen



Winter

Estee Wells

Last Day

There are one hundred and twenty-five thousand people like me on earth today, but that doesn't mean I'm not unique. I have a strong, beating heart—a heart to laugh, a heart to dance, a heart to love. I want to taste the cold rain of a spring thunderstorm, to feel the salty, summer ocean waves crashing over my body, to hear the crunching of fallen autumn leaves beneath my feet, to see the high winter mountains coated in snow. I want to live well.

I have less than twenty-four hours left.

He rolls over in bed, wishing Monday morning wouldn't come so soon as he slaps the "off" button on the alarm. Sitting up and scrubbing his face with his hands, his scratchy whiskers remind him he needs to shave. He shoves himself up out of bed and stumbles toward the bathroom, hoping the cold shower spray will drive the fog from his mind.

He pauses next to the bathroom door to glance at the small calendar on the wall. The date there punches him in the stomach. *September 24*. He leans heavily on the door post. *It's been...how many?* he wonders. *Nineteen years?* He forces his gaze away from the calendar and continues into the bathroom. Shutting the door behind him, he stares into the mirror. His eyes are dark, bloodshot, with black shadows beneath them. *Too much time...too many memories.*

He changes his mind about the cold shower and turns on the hot water instead. Steam fills the small room. Maybe the memories can be burned away.

Ruthie Burrell



Thirty minutes later, he exits the house, dressed in his normal dark slacks, dress shirt, and tie. Perhaps his work will help him forget the terrified look in his wife's eyes just before she died nineteen years ago.

I snuggle down to sleep. My bed feels soft, warm, safe. I dream about my tomorrows and what they could bring, what I could do. I wonder about who I could become. An artist? A musician? A doctor? A mother?

But my tomorrows will not be. Today is my last day.

She wakes up with a sick feeling in her stomach. *I can't do this*, she thinks. She gets out of bed and crosses to the window, staring outside with her arms wrapped tightly around her waist. *I have to. I can't keep going on like this.* She leans her forehead against the glass of the window, and its coolness seeps into her skin. The brisk breezes of fall had arrived only days before, and she was enjoying the relief from summer's hot rays.

She thinks about his angry face and harsh words. She remembers her mother's fierce whispers. She imagines her father's cold silence and heavy fists. *I have no choice.*

Her shower is quick, but she takes special care while getting dressed and fixing her hair. She's not sure why. There's no one to impress. Not today.

She goes out to the driveway and climbs into the car. Her fingers tremble as she turns the key in the ignition and backs onto the street. "Stop it," she says aloud, scolding herself. "There's nothing to worry about. Everything will be fine."

Nothing to worry about. Her trembling increases.

As I wait, I wonder about those I could meet but will not. Mother, father, brothers, sisters? Grandparents, cousins, friends? I dream about a soul-deep friendship.

Someone to share my hopes, fears, jokes, and bad days with. A real friendship where you can talk, debate, yell, or laugh as you choose. I wonder if there is a friend like that out there that I will never meet. I wish I could stay and meet him or her. I wish I didn't have to go so soon.

"Good morning, Doctor." His secretary's words greet him as he enters the clinic.

"Good morning."

"How are you today?"

"Fine. I'm fine." It's a lie, of course, but she isn't looking for the truth. "How many appointments today?" he asks.

"Five," she says, handing him several file folders.

"Thank you." He grabs the papers, offers her a slight smile, and heads to his office.

It is a cold, unwelcoming place, not really conducive to work. He does what he needs to each day and then returns home. He sits down at his desk, opens the top drawer, and digs through it, looking for a pen. Then he freezes. At the bottom of the drawer lies a single photo. He gently pulls it out.

Her eyes sparkle with life, as she laughs at him over her shoulder, her blonde curls flying in the wind. He remembers the day they were married, how happy he'd been. He tries to shove other memories away but can't.

"I had to do it," she says again. "I wasn't ready."

"You knew it wasn't safe." His words sound angry, accusatory. He tries to calm down. "You know why I didn't want you to do it. I didn't want you to get hurt."

She touches his cheek. "It'll be all right. It was my choice, my body. I'll be fine." As she adds the last part, her eyes plead with him to agree.

"Of course, you will," he says.

But she isn't. Infection has already set in, and her

sparkling eyes grow dim and dark with pain. As she lies in her hospital bed, she clenches his hand tightly in hers. "Don't let me go. I'm not ready!" she cries.

But there's nothing he can do.

He lets out a shuddering breath. Dropping the photo back in place, he shuts the drawer firmly. He had failed to keep her safe. He can only hope that by doing legally now what was illegal then, he can protect those like her—give others the long, full lives that she was denied.

What about love? Is there someone out there who I could love with everything in me and who would love me back? If happily-ever-afters exist, would there be one for me? And since I'm not there, will he miss out on it? Will he wander through life, wondering why no one is right for him, never realizing how I longed to meet him?

She pulls into the parking lot. Her trembling has ceased, but a cold numbness has spread through her arms and legs. She climbs stiffly from the car and walks inside. The walls of the room are bare and white.

White. White means life, she thinks. How is it that such a place can claim to bring life?

The woman at the large desk glances up from her computer. "May I help you?"

"Yes, please," she says, not knowing if the words are true or not. She gives her name and takes the paperwork the lady hands her.

She sits down on one of the cold, metal chairs lining the wall and tries to think clearly as she fills out the papers. Name? Easy enough. Age? She writes nineteen, three years older than she actually is. Address? She creates one.

She takes the papers back to the desk, and the woman leads her to a small room where she changes into a thin,

paper gown and sits down to wait.

How did I end up here? She had sought love and found anger and disdain. *White brings death. Love brings hate.* A line from a poem she recently read comes to mind. *'Here lies the body of this world, whose soul alas to hell is hurled.'*

If the world's soul is hurled to hell, then where is mine?

What about all the people I might come across in daily life? Those I could change, even if just with a friendly smile or a laugh? A helping hand missing, a word of encouragement absent, a gift not given. Will the world be different because I'm not there?

He enters the room and glances around. His assistant has already gone through the prepping procedure and stands waiting in the corner. He smiles and greets the patient. She gives a nearly inaudible reply, and he pauses, looking at her. She's young, very young. He glances at her paperwork. *Nineteen.* Probably not her real age, but having that particular number come up again makes him wonder. For an instant, he thinks about the other that he lost along with his wife. *Nearly the same age...*

"Do your parents know you're here?" He wouldn't usually ask that, but her frightened eyes bother him.

Her gaze drops to the floor. "My mom knows. My dad...if he knew..." She shivers, rubbing her bare arms.

That's when he sees the bruises. His gut clenches, and he mutters a curse. There's nothing he can do, of course—a recurring theme in his life.

Still, he leans forward. "No one can force you to do anything. You have the right to make this choice. No one can take that from you."

I want to stay longer. I want to breathe in cold, clear

air, to count the stars on warm nights, and to pick out shapes in the clouds. I want to catch snowflakes on my tongue and wade in a cool, bubbling spring. I want to watch the bright morning sunrises and see the brilliantly colored sunsets. I want to experience everything good about life.

But it seems that choice has been taken from me.

My choice? It's the only choice. She stares at the doctor, knowing he doesn't understand. His eyes say he has known pain, but he doesn't understand *her*. Doesn't know about her life, her parents, the one she had thought she loved. He doesn't understand the terror clutching her stomach, the thoughts flying through her mind, the numbness spreading through her body. He doesn't understand *that*. How could he?

"I've chosen," she says, trying to make her voice strong.

I wonder about the bigger things out there. Does anyone know about me—about my dreams? Does anyone care about what happens to me? Do I still have a purpose, even though I'll never taste the greatest things about life?

He nods. He didn't expect anything different. He washes his hands at the sink and snaps on his surgical gloves.

"Are you ready to begin the procedure?"

It's almost here. It's almost time to leave. I'm not sure what this life of mine can accomplish, but I think there's something. For if life ever loses its value, then death has truly won. I refuse to believe that will happen.

"I'm ready," she replies. *No. Say you want to leave, that you've changed your mind.* She silences her thoughts. I've chosen. *Everything will be fine. I'll be fine.*

This time she doesn't even try to make herself believe the words.

It's time. I know that. In a world of victims, I have become the last. Into my quiet rest enters a sudden pain. Darkness. Then a sense of something else...of someone with me.

My life's end has come.

But I refuse to believe this will be the end of my story.



Autos Chocadores

Daniel Saldi

The Funeral Reception

Dirt clods circle the mound
And fill the shoes of the dead and dying.
The wind smacks the foreheads of the tombs
And fraudulent flowers flick their heads in time.

There, with looks of looted mercy, are found
The watchers. They wolf down the sighing,
Leaving little time to sign the book at the front desk.
A grand party, returning to the land its dust,
Now rotting, and with a distinct smell of
Formaldehyde and hyacinths. Nearby, the birds fly
To their nests in the tree that daily
Eats Uncle William.

Closer still to the soil than he are the drowned
Worms that make all the fat women wail: crying,
They insist they saw the snake, tempting them to taste
the stale
Fruit for the final time. But it is not an apple,
Only a bit of dirt and a few fingers
Between two pieces of bread.

Jody Ford

SACRIFICE

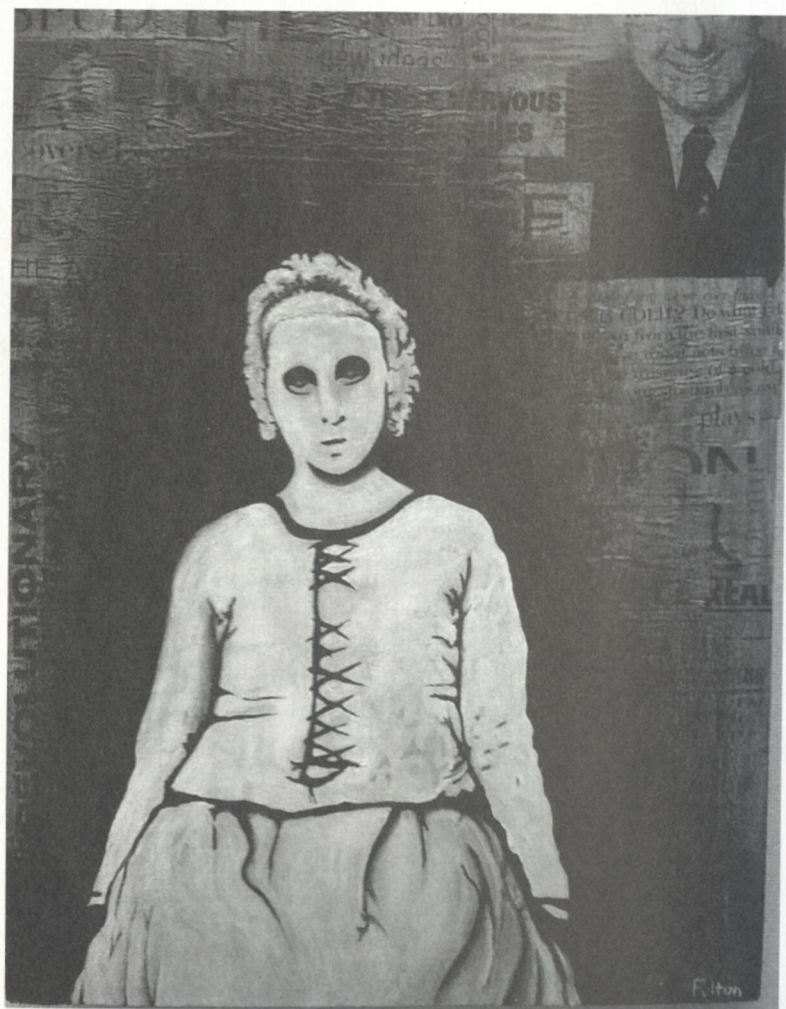
The slow gripping monotony—the hypnotic power of the rippling and surging water—was finally broken by a cut of silver above the surface, as though all of the lost energy of the day had made its way into the thrashing body of the fish. Tom hesitated after the first tug, but with the second he jerked backward, the tautness of his body matching that of the line. The pole rose like a victory flag declaring the battle as already won. It had been won when the barbed hook slid into the writhing worm, the first death a promise of the second. Tom pulled hard again and felt the rhythm in his fingers, drawing his victim closer with every clicking whirl. The line was tight and tighter and then shockingly slack. The hook cleared the water and leapt toward him, empty except for the slow turn of the still-struggling worm.

Andrea Walker



Humbling The Proud

Sarah Albinson



New Revolutionary

Jacob Fulton

Don't Go Chasing Your Shadow Because You Will Lose Every Single Rotten Time

The sun is before us,
Forcing our shadow
To follow frictionless
On the road behind us.

The shadow moves forward
And now leads the way.
Without the encumbrance
Of friction,

The shadow speeds on.

When the sun finally falls,
The shadow has won.

Andrew Broersma

Historic Philadelphia

Sara Storie

No, I Cannot Go to Dinner with You

Melanie Boronow

I cannot sit across from you at a square table in the corner draped with ivory linen and twirl my napkin ring around my finger until it slides off and rolls past the porcelain cup and saucer with the brown-striped rim and then stare down at my reflection in the silver spoon, wondering who she is that finds herself drowned here in restaurant din with you.

I cannot patiently answer the questions with polite fragments that drag along the hideous purple and gold carpet in this place until the stale conversation lulls me by the end of the evening into my Styrofoam take-out box where the smell of my cold, left-over linguini and potatoes smothers me.

No. No, I cannot go to dinner with you.

Dinner would be a lie
you almost convinced me
to whisper to you softly.

New Revolutionary
Jacob Pollan



Historic Philadelphia

Sam Stone

LIPS

Grey dust caresses the air and dissipates in a swirl of congenial poise, keeping rhythm with the music. Embers sift themselves into an unwanted tray, and I think of the world and what you ate for dinner and if it was on his lips.

Thaddeus Harmon

The taste on mine is not yours. I have no memory of the sensation. But you were there in my arms that night when ocean mists seized our arid faces, and the waves crashed into organ pipes aligning the shores, and you squeezed back, and we giggled to the sea. I know you kissed me then, just as I know the wind blew, and the moon shone truly. But I do not remember the taste.

Just as smoke, that memory also dissipates as I heave. The band plays something melancholy, and my soul laughs at the attempt. The song knows not pain.

A slant of light, glaring from the annals of a novel machine, thrusting music into the spaces between— that is pain. Tears forming lines, down my cheek, down my neck, to my chest, and light bleeding and glaring and that music, that music playing through the advertisements of some French war plane, and your face clear in the blurred lights of the fountains, looking past me to him as I utter the phrase in ignorance, "I love you."

Play that tune, band.

The waiter asks me something. I cannot hear him. The thrashing in my mind grows too loud. I nod, and smoke jets from my nostrils and singes my throat. A woman in the corner glares at me, and I imagine her holding her child closer to her in fear. Fear woman. Fear. Hold him close. Soon he will hold another closer and it will bury him.

I breathe deeply, trying to take in something—some unknown thing. And I exhale and I purse my lips and the smoke escapes, and the memories escape, but both yet reside and rot within me. There is no absolution. The pain can no more escape than the poison. One will kill me. But which?

I clear my throat and put out the fire. My lips have grown stale and I cannot taste them. Laughter profanes the room, and lovers smile as the band plays some song about her sweet kisses, and her sweet body, and her sweet taste. I sink deeper into myself and take a drink.

The wine seeps into the cracks of my lips and I revel in the momentary tingle of red—the sensation of burning. I sip the tartaric juice and let it travel down my throat and into my heart. I see the bottle on this table and I see the bottle on that table, and the two are the same. I see you looking into my eyes as a stranger, and him looking into his whisky as a friend, and you nodding for me to leave. I see myself through the reflections of side store windows, pacing ravenously down the cobbled streets, asking for wine. I see myself cracking the bottle and drinking, and drinking, and drinking, and I see the door knob twist, and the shoes lining the threshold, and I see him, staring into that whisky again, and I see you, your back to him, desperately washing dishes, and I imagine the distance between you two vanish, and I know that I was right, and I scream, “Fool!” in silence.

I rise to leave. My body trembles in anger but I do not sit—it will pass. I tip the hostess as I stumble by, and her eyes are brown, and your eyes are brown.

The streets are cold and the wind nips at my exposed flesh. I walk slowly and purse my lips to the air. It doesn't kiss back. Sounds and screams, and the restless noises of the city cage me in numbness. I see a beggar, his hair black, his eyes black, and I wonder at the rags he wears. I sit beside him and he glares at me as if shocked

by my appearance, and I smile insanely at the irony and he doesn't dare ask for anything.

Eyes closed, he mumbles something under his breath, and I leave.

I trip. And I remember our ignorance, and our youth, and being stranded, and deciding to walk the railroad tracks.

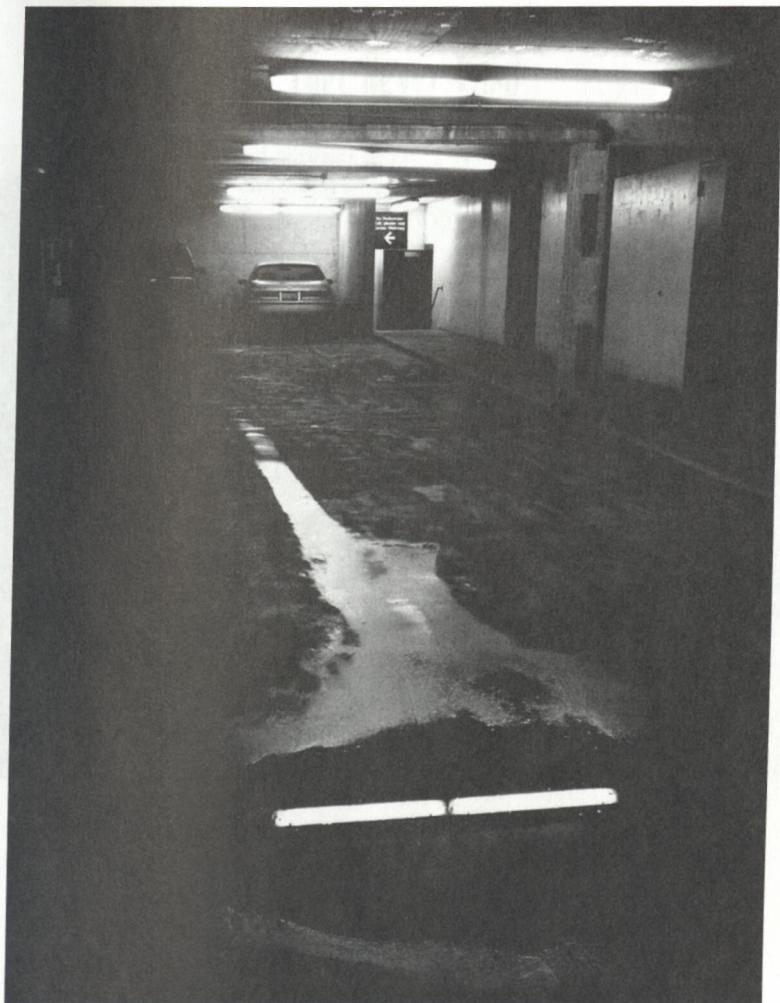
I remember how you looked at me as a stranger again, and nodded again, and I left again. And I paced ahead, and you two lagged behind—"Just talking," you had said. I tripped and fell, and stood. I heard your pacing feet on the loose stones, and I silenced mine, and yours silenced and I knew betrayal once again, and you kissed him once again.

I walk the stairs to my space and I fumble for my keys. I feel the bolt turn and I press the door gently because I want to kick it in. I walk inside.

The moonlight gleams on the edges of the furniture and I leave the lights off because I want to turn them on and rip off my clothes and cry. I slump into my black chair.

Ever so gently, in feigned drowsiness, your voice clangs from the bedroom, and I answer deceitfully, so sweetly, and rise toward the kitchen. I stumble into the corner of the cupboard—the pain welcomed. I pour your glass of water and my eye catches a sock on the floor. And I know that it has happened again, and I know that you have betrayed me. I crash to my knees and I grab the thing. I press it to my lips and I taste the foul odor and the salt of the sweat, and I wonder how much of his sweat was your sweat this night. I light a match and I reach for the trash can. I burn the thing into oblivion.

And ever so sweetly, gently, I slip into bed, and you grumble about my stench, and I wrap my arms around you. And the taste is on my lips.



City Lot

Brad Nickerson



Joseph

Rachel Tobin

Clouds Gather (But Never Rain)

I want you to understand
when I say my consistency
is cloudy. It's like
the weather today.

The clouds gather
and gather
and gather and gray,
but never rain.

Melanie Boronow

Why won't they just
rain? I am inconsistent
and cloudy. I am
wispy water vapor,
but heavy and tired
of floating
above this
dry earth.



Overachiever

Christine Crosby

The Silent Psalm

I wish I could paint you a picture
of the tan-gold un-leafed swamp limbs
reaching up to the God-blue sky,
their split-hair tips
embracing the sun.

But I'm afraid my eight Crayola watercolors
couldn't capture the brilliance of the sky I bathe in,
and my stick figures
would do no justice to the ramrods standing there,
even though they are only sticks after all.

Hannah Chupp

And I wish I could charade for you
how my feet sank into the waiting, ready grass,
how I found my own private pocket of mud
and how it enveloped my toesal region
with its cool and melancholic joy.

But I don't know how to express this
without becoming a jester,
without seeming the fool,
when all I want is for you to know the childhood that
I found
there in the mud.

And I deeply wish I could sing for you
the glad, glad song of the red-winged blackbirds
as they gleefully shouted,
"Rejoice, rejoice, for spring is here!"
Or:

"Please, please, mate with me."

Or:

"Oh dear, oh dear, why does that rude intruder disrupt
us so?"

(I couldn't tell which.)

And even more, the song of the grass
as it captured my feet,
gurgling for all the world
like an acre-wide bowl of Rice Krispies.

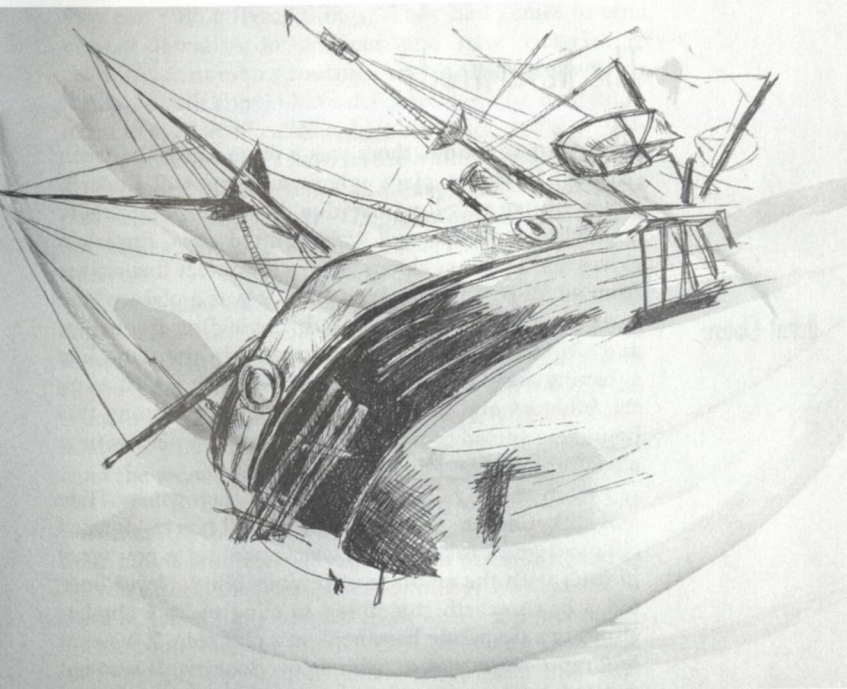
But my voice is too weak
for the thunder of the Spring,
and the chords in my throat
just can't play such a melody
without sounding like yet another cover band of the
Beatles.

It pains me that
I cannot paint justly enough,
I cannot show you earnestly enough,
I cannot sing loudly enough.

And I lie here on a simple bridge
in a simple gathering of brush
by a simple lake
in a simple land.

But that is enough to awe me
and to render me incapable
of anything other than

Silence.



Watercolor Ship

Sarah Albinson

The Neverwoods

Brent Clouse

Once upon a time, there was a place caught between seasons. It was a place where autumn still lingered when winter was long overdue. It was a place where boys played outside and wore knitted caps, fingerless gloves and hand-me-down jackets to protect themselves from an always-approaching chill. It was a place where trees changed their colors with unyielding frequency, and where each falling leaf resonated in the wind like a tuning fork—which could strike a chord in even the bitterest and most sensible of hearts. Among this boundless spread of trees, the boys found a place where adventure was equally immeasurable.

Day in and day out the boys played their games. Hide and seek. Capture the flag. They battled pirates, formed alliances and broke them. Never once did a boy wrap himself with the embrace of responsibility. Never once did a boy unearth something to cling to as a climber clings to a desperate handhold on a cliff side. It was not ignorance—nor was it a simple overlooking. It was not noticed because it—whatever *it* was—was not there. The woods, in a suspended mystery of falling leaves and turning colors, did not name these things.

Something blue. Something flying. A bird perhaps?

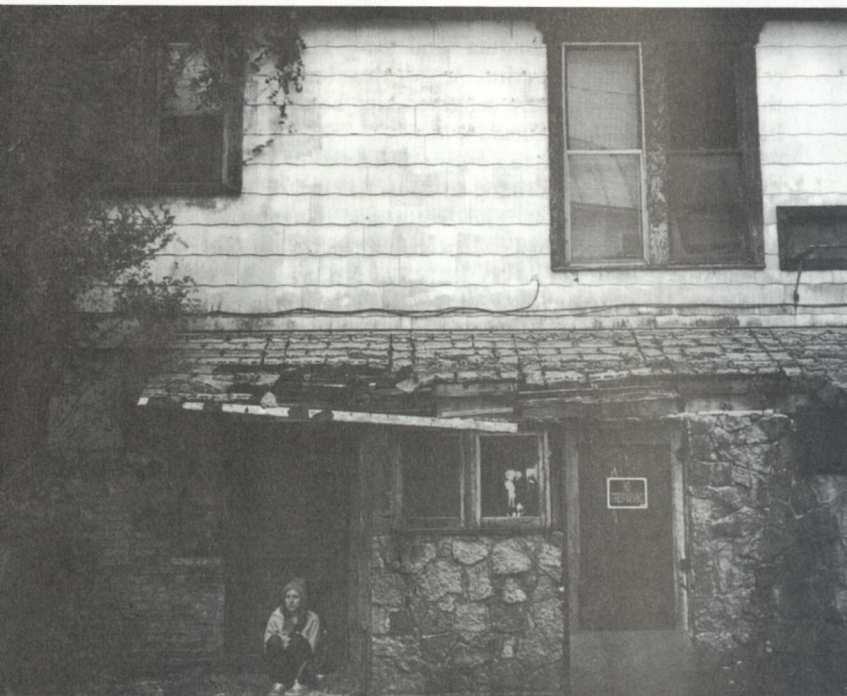
He thought of these things between games and during nights that ought to have been lonely, but nonetheless, unorthodox thoughts kept him company until sleep washed over him or the dawn welcomed him with another day of timeless autumn. When the morning arrived, he told no one of these things. He stored them inside, keeping them safe. What would they say? Would

they care? Blue flying things? They had games to tend to—old domains to conquer and new victories to celebrate. A numbing routine. And during times when a thrill of youth should have delighted him, he thought to himself: *Will this last? Should it last?*

The other boys began to notice a difference in him—a difference not unlike noticing an apple had begun to rot just before biting into it. They continued their games, but in keeping their distance from him, began to plot in secret.

A forbidden rumor told of the end of the woods—an edge to an immeasurable autumn. Somewhere westward it was said that the air grew warmer and the leaves stayed green. And eastward the leaves withered and the branches became like black spiders' legs. The air of this land was cold, originating from distances unfathomable from the woods. The boys did not speak of these things, but woke to each morning knowing them fully. They would spend the rest of their day driving the idea from their minds with their adventures, all the while looking for ways to rid themselves of the one boy who reminded them of colder days many of them would never greet.

But soon the day came when scheming and time itself caught up to him. The boys tricked him into felling the one thing he dreamed of most—something blue, something flying, a bird perhaps? And in taking a chance, a hope so desperate and fragile that an easy wind could topple it, he embraced a responsibility for his actions, being forced to leave the woods he had known for all his years and venture into colder times.



What if you could find a way to live a life that was not so different from the life you are living now? What if you could find a way to live a life that was not so different from the life you are living now? What if you could find a way to live a life that was not so different from the life you are living now?

Waiting

Melissa Jerome

WALTZING WITH GORILLAS

An Interview with Jeanne Murray Walker on the English Language, the Magic of Metaphor, the Value of Form, and the Author's Journey

Poet, playwright and professor JEANNE MURRAY WALKER is the author of seven books of poetry, the most recent being *New Tracks, Night Falling*. She heads the creative writing concentration at the University of Delaware and also serves on the faculty of Seattle Pacific University's Master of Fine Arts Program. As a poetry editor she has worked with *Christianity and Literature* and is currently on the editorial board for *Image* and *Shenandoah*. Walker has given lectures and readings at such places as Oxford University, the Library of Congress, and at Taylor University's Making Literature Conference. Currently, she is working on a volume of new and selected poems, which will be released in 2012.

Ellen McConnell: Let's start with a few basics: How did you begin writing poetry? What inspired you and who were your major influences?

Jeanne Walker: I started writing in high school—in part, at least, because our senior English teacher introduced us to Richard Wilbur. I began reading poetry and during my life I've returned often to a few enigmatic and compelling voices, including Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, Theodore Roethke, Wallace Stevens and Shakespeare.

EM: After receiving your Masters at Loyola University, you were initially resistant to the idea of getting a Ph.D. What changed your mind? What do you consider to be the value of an advanced degree?

JW: Given the arduous road one has to travel to get a Ph.D., I needed to be sure that I really had to have that degree before I plunged in. So, after finishing my master's, I taught eleventh grade for a year during the wild and wooly late sixties. The experience convinced me that I did, actually, want to teach on the university level. The value of the Ph.D. to me has been just that—it has allowed me to teach students at a developmental stage I love. It's also allowed me to spend my life thinking about and drawing attention to the radiant and illusive and brilliant works we are lucky enough to have in our language. What a fantastic way to spend my days!

EM: Having read some of your work, I'm interested in how you approach writing as a person of faith. In what ways do you think your faith is an asset to your writing? Are there ways in which you feel it has limited you—creatively, perhaps, or in the scope of your audience?

JW: I don't think much about my faith while I'm writing. I think about questions of voice and metaphor and sound and rhythm. Writing for me is about language—about how the sentence plays off against the lines of a sonnet, for example. I work at varying the context of a villanelle so the repeated lines mean something new every time they appear. As I write I am conscious of word, word, word—and how those words are set in syntax and how the syntax is set within the boundaries of form.

What I write arises out of what I think about, of

course—what nags at me. I am on a faith journey and I think plenty about that journey. But writing a poem that happens to deal with faith isn't at all like writing an essay with a clear thesis. A poem may start with a metaphor, for example, or a word, or something even slighter—an inkling. I only learn the meaning of the poem as I write it. Odd as it may sound, I often don't know what I think until I discover it through writing. The process involves following a metaphor to its conclusion, or pursuing sound, almost the way a composer might.

I am grateful and delighted that readers find some of what I write worthwhile. I love to meet my readers. Many of them email and they show up at readings, where they introduce themselves. The writing process is always ultimately about connecting with readers. But even if I wanted to, I probably couldn't figure out how to change my writing to increase the audience. To me, writing poetry feels more like being overheard than like speaking directly, the way I talk when I'm buying a ball of string or ordering a Coke—or even writing an essay.

EM: In April 2004 you did a reading at Taylor University. During your address you said you felt you were “born to write poems.” What led you to this realization? Do you, in some sense, view your writing as a response to a spiritual calling?

JW: Did I say that? Well, when I read Kant as an undergraduate and tried to write a paper about him—or any of the other philosophers we read—I discovered that I couldn't write very well without using metaphors. I'm just not very good at thinking in abstractions. It's not the way I see the world. Surely part of realizing what you do well is discovering the opposite, becoming aware of what you can't do, and what you had better give up.

Finding that I could write poetry was a remarkable gift, even though it was accompanied by the realization that I'd never be a philosopher. Perhaps that kind of insight is, yes, not only a gift, but also a kind of spiritual calling.

EM: Many of your poems—"Luci's Knee," for example, or "How Mother Courage Saves Desdemona"—are dedicated to people you know personally. How does writing dedicated poetry differ from writing "open" poems? Do you ever feel pressure to compromise personal aspects in your poetry in order to make the message more universal?

JW: Poems dedicated to people I know aren't very different from poems that are—as you call them—"open." They're not meant to be a secret joke or private communication with the person to whom they're dedicated. I dedicated "Mother Courage" to Susan Sweeney because she had just acted the part of Mother Courage in Brecht's play. In fact, I probably wouldn't have been thinking about Mother Courage if I hadn't talked to Susan about that script and then seen her play the role. Susan made Mother Courage work for me—partly, maybe, because she's full of spunk, like Mother Courage. So I imagined Mother Courage getting loose from her script and saving Desdemona, who, after all, has been dying in the script of "Othello" for four hundred years. The poor innocent thing needs saving! The dedication to Susan was a kind of thank-you for spurring that idea. I dedicated the knee poem to Luci because Luci is a very dear friend and she had just been through a knee replacement.

You ask whether I've ever compromised personal details to make the message of a poem more universal. The fact is, I never write exactly what happened. I don't

think anyone does. Art requires the selection of details. I suppose even that kind of weeding out might be called a “compromise.” But just imagine the poem where that kind of compromise hasn’t been made! It would go on endlessly.

On the other hand, I’ve come to believe very specific images can represent universal experience if the images are vivid and available to the reader. Maybe that sounds paradoxical. When I was writing my third book of poetry, which was about being pregnant and having a child, I had an agent who counseled me to keep the poems general so readers could connect with them. But I found it didn’t work that way. The human mind seems naturally to read specific images as metaphor. As Shakespeare said, what we want is “a local habitation and a name.”

EM: So far I’ve mentioned only your work as a poet, but you also write plays, essays and teach English at the University of Delaware. Is there a creative source that is common to all these roles, or do you keep them mostly separate?

JW: For me writing is writing. Well, I shouldn’t say that so fast. Knowing the forms is absolutely crucial for a writer. There is a basic tool kit for each of the forms I work in. The tool kits may share some strategies, but for the most part they are distinct. It’s taken me a long time to learn the toolkits for poetry and play writing and memoir, and I’m still learning.

I should pause to say that I’m deeply grateful for form. Without the forms, my writing life would be chaotic. After all, God’s first act of creation in Genesis was to separate things, to make categories. Form doesn’t limit writers; it leads us to endless variety—as forms do in

nature. Consider the array of trees we have available to revel in. The diversity is splendid and outrageous and worth celebrating every day—the silhouette of their trunks, the color of their bark, the bizarre and lovely shapes of their leaves.

About three years ago, I decided for various reasons that I needed to write 50 sonnets. Writing each of them, I took a journey to a different country than I had ever been in. Drafting a sonnet requires coming up with a rhyme approximately every seven words. Many of the lines in a contemporary sonnet are not end stopped. So you're composing a sentence that might include two rhymes roughly seven words apart, somewhere in the middle of the sentence, dictated by sounds you've already committed yourself to earlier in the poem. This sentence must also keep to an iambic pentameter beat. And of course, above all, it needs to make sense, and to use metaphor, and to lead the reader to an interesting idea.

Composing this way in form is a little like waltzing with an 800-pound gorilla. The gorilla is the English language. You start with a metaphor or a word or just a stance toward the reader, but soon you feel the pushback from the language. You develop language muscles and you shove back. You hope something good comes of that waltz. And sometimes it does.

As for how writing and teaching work together: about half of what I teach is script writing and poetry writing, not only at the University of Delaware, but also in the Seattle Pacific University MFA Program. The other half of my teaching load is reading. Reading and writing are two sides of the same coin, I think. If you don't read everything you can get your hands on, you run out of fresh writing strategies.

EM: Some say that the better part of genius is hard work; others argue that good writing is born out of inspiration. What role do you think inspiration plays in your creative process?

JW: Hard work isn't opposed to inspiration for me. Most of the inspiration I get arrives when I'm sitting in a chair, working—or at least trying to work. Oh, I do get little jabs of ideas sometimes when I'm driving, for instance, but most complex, significant insight comes when I'm slaving away at my desk.

EM: To date, you have written seven books of poetry over a period of almost 20 years. Looking back, what characteristics do you think define or unite your work?

JW: I'm trying to figure that out, because this summer I need to put together a New and Selected volume. It will be coming out probably in 2012. Who was it that said most writers are obsessed with the same theme all their lives? There's even a sense in which poets keep writing the same poem over and over. And strangely enough, the poet herself never quite sees what that theme is.

CONTRIBUTORS



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